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**BUILDING COMMON GROUND IN
INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS:**

A Study of Classroom Interaction in an
Employment Preparation Programme for Canadian Immigrants

Mabel Paderez Victoria

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The Open University

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on how a group of linguistically and culturally diverse individuals in an employment preparation class for immigrants to Canada use communicative strategies and resources to build common ground, that is, how they use language to form a socially cohesive group that foregrounds shared knowledge, shared relational identity, in-group membership and shared attitudes and feelings.

The thesis draws from a 12-week ethnographically informed study using participant observation with audio recording and semi-structured interviews as the main methods of data collection. It builds on the combined insights drawn from the well-established discipline of interethnic communication and the relatively new but growing field of research on English as a *lingua franca*. While the former illuminates factors that make intercultural communication problematic, the latter sheds light on what makes it work despite cultural differences and linguistic limitations.

In analysing the data, which consists primarily of transcriptions from audio recordings of spoken classroom interactions, the thesis draws analytic inspiration from scholarship situated in discourse analysis, interactional sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. It borrows concepts from the Communities of Practice framework to understand how individuals from highly diverse backgrounds develop shared ways of talking/behaving and negotiate interactional norms.

The thesis contributes to academic knowledge in several ways. It challenges common assumptions about miscommunication in intercultural contexts. It shows miscommunication episodes as potentially productive sites for negotiating meaning and restructuring social relations. It argues that the notion of ‘national’ culture, which has fallen into disfavour amongst scholars, should not simply be dismissed because an

analysis of the data collected suggests that it can serve as a multifaceted interactional resource for speakers alongside other identity categories. An important contribution of this thesis to the field of intercultural communication lies in its careful attention to what participants actually do in interaction over an extended period of time rather than starting from any *a priori* assumptions.

DEDICATION

To Martina and Ruben Victoria,

Tita Nene, and

Josef Jans.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It has not has been submitted for a degree or other qualification to the Open University or any other university or institution for examination.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am very grateful to my examiners, Prof Janet Holmes and Ms Barbara Mayor for their valuable suggestions and very encouraging comments.

¹ I cannot give full names and affiliations of some individuals because doing so might compromise the anonymity of my research site.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iv
Declaration	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	vii
 PART I: LOCATING THIS STUDY	 1
 CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION	 3
1.1 What has driven this study.....	3
1.1.1 The ‘Public Version’	3
1.1.2 The ‘Other Version’	6
1.2 Working Definitions: ‘Culture’ and ‘Intercultural’	9
1.2.1 Culture.....	9
1.2.2 Intercultural Communication	11
1.3 Locating the Research Context	12
1.4 Epistemological and Ontological Grounding	15
1.5 Overview and Organisation of the Thesis.....	18
1.5.1 The Study and its Aims	18
1.5.2 Outline of the Thesis	19
 CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW	 23
2.1 Introduction	23
2.2 Culture and Intercultural Interaction.....	23
2.3 Approaches To Intercultural Communication.....	27
2.3.1 Interethnic Communication.....	28
2.3.1.1 Related Studies: Problematic Aspects of Intercultural Communication.....	34
2.3.1.2 ‘Ideologically-induced’ Optimism.....	35
2.3.2 <i>Lingua Franca</i> Communication in English	37
2.3.2.1 English as a <i>Lingua Franca</i> (ELF) or <i>Lingua Franca</i> English (LFE)	38
2.3.2.2 Making Communication Work in <i>Lingua Franca</i> Interactions	40
2.3.2.3 <i>Lingua Franca</i> and Interethnic Communication.....	43
2.4. The Relationship Imperative.....	45

2.4.1	Establishing Relations through Language.....	46
2.4.1.1	Attending to Face Needs: Belonging, Involvement, Non-Imposition	47
2.4.1.2	Comity and the Maintenance of Friendly Relations	50
2.4.1.3	Relational Practice	52
2.5	The Community of Practice	54
2.5.1	Dimensions of Communities of Practice	58
2.5.2	The Development of Shared Practices Overtime.....	60
2.6	Summary and Conclusion	61
CHAPTER THREE	METHODOLOGY	65
3.1	Introduction.....	65
3.1.1	Overarching Research Interest.....	65
3.2.	An Ethnographically Informed Approach	66
3.2.1.	<i>Linguistic</i> Ethnography	67
3.2.2	Reflexivity.....	68
3.3	The Research Context.....	68
3.3.2	THE EPPI.....	70
3.3.3	‘Naming’ the EPPI participants	71
3.4	Data Collection	72
3.4.1	Scoping Study	72
3.4.1.1	Working Guide Questions.....	74
3.4.2	The Main Study.....	75
3.4.2.1	Access Negotiation	76
3.4.2.2	Getting Informed Consent.....	77
3.4.2.3	Field Relations: Having Common Ground with the Researched.....	78
3.4.2.4	The EPPI participants: Students.....	79
3.4.2.5	The EPPI participants: Teachers	86
3.4.2.6	Methods of Data Collection	86
3.5	Processing and Analysing the Data	97
3.5.1	Transcription	101
3.5.2	Criteria for Decisions Taken on Selecting What to Transcribe	102
3.5.2.1	Temporal Dimension.....	102
3.5.2.2	Initial Findings from Scoping study.....	102
3.5.2.3	What Seemed Salient for the EPPI participants.....	103
3.5.2.4	Counter-evidence	104

3.5.3	Analytic Inspirations	104
3.5.4	Accounting for Validity of Interpretation	106
3.6	Ethics in an Intercultural Context.....	109
3.6.1	Transcribing <i>Non-native Speakers'</i> Talk	110
3.6.2	Shared Cultural and Linguistic Background.....	111
3.7	Summary and Conclusion	112

PART II:	DATA ANALYSIS	113
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CHAPTER FOUR

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF COMMON GROUND: BUILDING ONE

TEAM, ONE FAMILY	115
4.1 Introduction	115
4.2 Common Ground	116
4.2.1 Common Ground as 'Shared Knowledge'	116
4.2.2 Common Ground as 'Relational Identity' and 'In-Group Membership'	119
4.2.3 Common Ground as 'Affective Convergence'	121
4.3 The Starting Points	123
Week 2 WS310042.18.09.09 Cooking class: We are the EPPI team	125
Week 3 WS310049.25.09.09 More than a team	130
Week 4 WS310050.28.09.09 Superheroes.....	134
4.4 Erecting the Building Blocks.....	135
4.4.1 Sharing Experience: Stories and Salient Identities	135
Week 1, Day 1 Dealing with Grief from Loss	136
Week 1, Day 1 Research Journal	136
Week 2 Interpersonal/Intercultural Skills Class.....	138
Week 2 WS310032.17.09.09 I am the only child	138
Week 2 WS310032.17.09.09 Thank God to the Filipino country	143
Week 3 WS310050.28.09.09 How do you know my wife is Filipino?	145
4.4.2 Using Humour.....	147
Week 2 WS310028.15.09.09 Officially being teased.....	147
Week 2 WS31003142.18.09.09 Live chicken.....	149
4.4.3 Giving Approval and Compliments	151
Week 2 WS310021.14.09.09 Hard to retire.....	152
Week 2 WS310032.17.09.09 Energy	152

Week 4 WS310056.30.09.09	Breath of fresh air	153
4.5	Protecting the Foundations: Repair Strategies	154
4.5.1	Minor Repair work	154
Week 3 WS310060.30.09.09	A bit of latitude	154
4.5.2	Major Repair work	155
Week 2 WS310021.14.09.09	As I am a criminal.....	156
Week 2 WS310025.16.09.09	I apologise in public.....	161
Week 2 WS310021.17.09.09	You're English for me	164
Week 4 WS310051.28.09.09	My dear neighbour.....	165
Week 4 WS310056.30.09.09	I'm worried about my dear neighbour	166
4.6	Summary and Conclusion	167
 CHAPTER FIVE MAINTAINING COMMON GROUND: WORKING TOGETHER, HAND IN HAND		
		171
5.1	Introduction.....	171
5.2.	Levels of Common Ground	172
5.3	Instantiations of Common Ground	174
5.4	Solidifying the Building Blocks.....	176
5.4.1	Shared experience: Stories and Salient Identities	176
Week 6 WS310091.12.10.09	Mahal kita ((I love you)).....	177
Week 7 WS310086.19.10.09	Unlike the other Filipinos	179
5.4.2	Shared Stories: Small Talk in Unofficial Space.....	184
Week 7 WS310096.23.10.09	In labour.....	185
5.4.3	Humour: Sustained Harmonious Relationship.....	187
Week 6 WS310069.06.10.09	Just say 'yes'!	188
Week 12 WS310181.25.11.09	Scary exam.....	189
Week 9 WS310069.06.10.09	They're awesome.....	190
5.5	Shared Practices Developed Over Time.....	192
5.5.1	Shared Ways of Talking and In-Group Identity Markers	192
Week 5 WS310083.09.10.09	What?	193
Week 5 WS310083.09.10.09	You understand?	195
5.5.2	Shared Perspectives and Elliptical Language	197
Week 5 WS310077.07.10.09	Tom's skin	197
Week 11 WS310159.18.11.09	Not Jinky.....	199

5.5.3	Shared Expectations and Mutual Accountability	202
	Week 5 WS310082.09.10.09 You didn't ask me.....	203
	Week 9 WS310124.02.11.09 You didn't tell me.....	204
	Week 12 WS310178.25.11.09 He didn't tell us.....	205
5.5.4	Shared Ways of Showing Involvement: Advice-giving.....	208
	Week 5 WS310077.07.10.09 Eye problem.....	209
	Week 8 WS3100IC.30.10. 09 Medicine of coconut something.....	211
	Week 9 WS3100123.03.11.09 Call Rome	213
5.5.5	Shared Values for Preserving Common Ground.....	215
	Week 11 WS310159.18.11.09 I trust you	215
	Week 12 Last day of class Love all of you	217
5.6	Leaving Common Ground.....	218
5.6.1	Approaching the End Points	218
	Week 9 WS3100124.4.11.09 Our commonalities unite us	218
5.6.2	A 'Long Conversation'	220
	Week 11 WS310158.18.11.09 In the same boat	220
5.6.3	Go with Peace and Hope and Joy.....	226
	Week 12 WS310179.25.11.09 A sad day	228
	Week 12 WS310179.25.11.09 Success as one family	229
5.7	Summary and Conclusion	230
 CHAPTER SIX 'MISCOMMUNICATION' AND COMMON GROUND		
6.1	Introduction	235
6.2	Understanding 'Miscommunication'	236
6.2.1	The term 'miscommunication' in this study	236
6.2.2	Identifying Instances of Miscommunication.....	237
	WS310099.27.10.09 Haircut.....	238
	WS310165.20.11.09 Pester.....	242
6.2.3	What Miscommunication can do	243
6.3	Preventing Miscommunication	245
	WS310114.30.10.09 White.....	245
	WS310091.21.10.09 Bad comment	246
	WS310089.21.10.09 Pants in the family.....	247
	WS310026.30.09.09 Chicken and egg.....	248
	WS310137.09.11.09 roygbiv	250

6.4	Social and Interpersonal Functions of Miscommunication.....	253
6.4.1	Failed Jokes as a Vitalizing Force.....	253
	WS310058.30.09.09 Tell us/Telus joke.....	254
	WS310058.30.09.09 Smells like blue paint.....	257
	WS310114.30.10.09 Why are frogs so happy?.....	258
6.4.2	Miscommunication and Protecting Common Ground	269
	WS310057.30.09.09 White Underwear	269
	WS310063.01.10.09 I did a mistake	275
6.5	Miscommunication as a Resource	284
	WS310042.18.09.09 Cooking class: not women's work.....	285
6.6	Summary and Conclusion	291
 PART III: SUMMING UP		298
 CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUSION.....		299
7.1	Introduction.....	299
7.2	Common Ground in Intercultural Encounters	299
7.2.1	The Other Side of the EPPI Common Ground.....	301
7.3	Key Insights	304
7.3.1.	Strategic Use of Communicative Resources.....	305
7.3.2	Preventing Misunderstanding in the Classroom	306
7.3.3	'Lawlessness' and 'Suspension of Expectations'	307
7.3.4	CofP and Common Ground.....	308
7.3.5	<i>Culture</i> in Intercultural Encounters.....	309
7.4	Significant Contributions to Knowledge.....	310
7.4.1	Knowledge claims: Particularity and Transferability	310
7.4.2	Contributions.....	311
7.4.2.1	Theoretical significance	312
7.4.2.2	Heuristic and Methodological Significance	314
7.5	Sucesses and Limitations	315
7.5.1	Successes.....	315
7.5.2	Limitations	316
7.6	Implications	317
7.6.1	Further Research	319

7.7 Conclusion: 'The Other Version'	320
REFERENCES	323
PUBLICATIONS DRAWN FROM THESIS	347
APPENDICES	348
APPENDIX 1 Scoping Study Request Letter	349
APPENDIX 2 Research Table	351
APPENDIX 3 Information and Consent (2 parts)	352
APPENDIX 4.1 Interview Guide for Teachers	357
APPENDIX 4.2 Interview Guide for Students	358
APPENDIX 5 Observation notes	359
APPENDIX 6 Excerpt from Research Journal	360
APPENDIX 7 Transcription Conventions	361
APPENDIX 8 Ethics Approval: (CWC)	362
APPENDIX 9 Ethics Approval: (OU)	363

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Photo: Researcher as 'Participant 'Observer'	88
Figure 2 Table: Class Schedule	89
Figure 3 Diagram: Seating Arrangement, Weeks 1 - 8	90
Figure 4 Diagram: Seating Arrangement, Weeks 9 - 12	91
Figure 5 Table: Observation Schedule, Weeks 1 - 6	95
Figure 6 Table: Observation Schedule, Weeks 7 - 12	96
Figure 7 Screen Shot: Transcription System	99
Figure 8 Photo: A Joint Production	129
Figure 9 Photo: The Finished Product	129
Figure 10 Diagram: Layers of Common Ground	174
Figure 11 Photo: Greg's Apology	217
Figure 12 Photo: PowerPoint Slide	227
Figure 13 Diagram: Miscommunication	291

PART I: LOCATING THIS STUDY

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

We are in all in the same boat [...] because all immigrants also they will understand our feelings [...] tell them our story, it will help them.

Rachana, research participant

1.1 WHAT HAS DRIVEN THIS STUDY

1.1.1 The ‘Public Version’

This study has been motivated by a ‘lingering sense of frustration’ (Firth and Wagner 2007: 800) and a ‘sense of unease’ (Rampton 2005: 05) with the dominant discourse on second language acquisition (SLA) and intercultural communication. It has been driven by an overwhelming need to make sense of the disparity between my own experiences and what I read in the prevailing literature.

In 1997, Firth and Wagner argued for a reconceptualization of SLA research. As they put it at that time, the SLA theorizing that had dominated the field portrayed the foreign language learner as a ‘deficient communicator struggling to overcome an underdeveloped L2 [Second Language] competence, striving to reach the “target” competence of an idealized NS [Native Speaker]’ (Firth and Wagner 1997: 296 -7). In trying to make sense of their data, they looked to SLA literature for explanations. Their data consisted of audio recordings of and foreign language speakers who were ‘artfully adept at overcoming linguistic hurdles, exquisitely able to work together interactionally, despite having what at first blush appeared to be imperfect command of the languages they were using’ (Firth and Wagner 2007: 801). However, when they looked for theoretical principles and insights from SLA literature, they were perplexed with what they found:

rather than *depictions of interactional success* in an L2, we found an overwhelming emphasis on and preoccupation with the individual's *linguistic and pragmatic failure*. Rather than *talk*, we found *input*. Rather than *achievement*, we found an abundance of *problem-sources*. Rather than *collaboration, invention, and an extraordinarily creative use of shared resources* [...] we found references to *errors, input modifications, interference, and fossilizations* (Firth and Wagner 2007: 801, my emphasis).

My lived experiences as a non-native speaker² of English and as a language learner did not reflect what I read in the literature. When I started to learn High German ten years ago, I found myself in a classroom of speakers of other native languages; beginner level German was our only common language. Most of the students knew some words in English, a few nouns in Spanish and Italian and some expressions in Schweizerdeutsch which is the Swiss dialect. We would usually try to begin our conversations in High German but when we ran out of German vocabulary we would 'throw in' a few words of English, Italian, Spanish or French complemented by matching facial expressions and accompanying verbal gestures. We even planned what I remember to be a very successful Christmas event using our beginner level High German.

When I taught Business English to native speakers of French, Italian and Schweizerdeutsch in Switzerland, I was intrigued by the strategies that the students were using to make their communication work. They used English to interact with banking clients from all over the world either on the phone, via email or face to face. In spite of grammatical errors and linguistic infelicities, they seemed to have consistently

² Although I am uncomfortable with the term 'non-native' speaker, I use it in this thesis in broad terms to refer to speakers whose mother tongue is not English. I use it to refer to language users/learners that were socialised from early childhood into a language/s other than English.

managed to successfully negotiate foreign transactions and investments; despite differences in backgrounds, they were able to establish relationships of trust and confidence with their clients from China, the Middle East, the United States and Europe. In Firth's and Wagner's (1997; 2007) case, the business wholesalers and traders who participated in their study successfully sold thousands of tons of Danish cheese, fish and steel every day notwithstanding the use of a second/foreign language. These situations illustrate that the speakers' lack of second/foreign language proficiency and their differences in communication conventions are not pre-determined barriers to be overcome but part of the interactional context which may or may not become salient in the ongoing talk. As Saville-Troike (2003: 168) points out, 'multilinguals have a wider range of options for accomplishing communicative goals, including a capacity for style shifting and style creation or blending (depending on desired audience effect) which exceeds monolingual competence'. However, the image of the multilingual person as a resourceful and creative speaker has tended to be overshadowed by the portrayal of the L2 learner as 'the source of the difficulty, [on the grounds that] the language they speak is a deficient version of the interlocutor's' (Rampton 2005: 282).

In addition to the view of the non-native speaker as a deficient communicator, another source of unease and lingering frustration that has set the trajectory of this study has been the incomplete and inaccurate representation of intercultural communication as necessarily problematic and vulnerable to breakdowns and misunderstanding. I have lived and worked in three English speaking countries – the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. I am currently a permanent resident of Switzerland, a country with four official languages – German, French, Italian and Romansh. Most of my career background involved helping immigrants get integrated into their new country, helping them find employment and teaching them 'survival' English. The immigrants and

language learners I worked with did have many problems stemming from language difficulties and unfamiliarity with foreign ways of behaving and doing things. But they also had many successes. Yet a huge volume of intercultural communication literature (see Gumperz and Tannen 1979; Thomas 1983; Varonis and Gass 1985; Gass and Varonis 1991; Gumperz 1982, 1992, 2001a, 2003) seems to have focused disproportionately on the problematic aspects of intercultural encounters.

This study has been propelled by the need to investigate intercultural encounters further because I felt that ‘something was not right’ (Firth and Wagner 2007: 801), something felt uneasy. As Rampton (2005: 05) observes, ‘a lot of ethnography starts with a sense of unease about prevailing discourses, and with the observation of a disparity between the claims that these discourses make about social life, and what you can see in social life as it actually seems to happen’. This thesis will explore two different but intersecting discourses – first, that non-native speakers of English are somehow deficient communicators; second that differences in cultural and linguistic backgrounds make communication across cultures problematic and susceptible to misunderstanding. I am interested in illuminating what might have been left in the shadows – the less problematic and the more positive nature of intercultural encounters. I am interested in throwing some light on how, in spite of potential communication barriers, speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds manage to achieve mutual understanding using English as a common language.

1.1.2 The ‘Other Version’

It makes me feel inadequate when linguists say that they want to expose inequalities and racism in urban societies by researching gatekeeping and institutional encounters. I suppose it is good in a way but whenever they pick up the cudgel for immigrants and non-native English speakers like me, I feel like a ‘helpless victim’ in

need of rescuing. I feel inadequate because the assumption behind ‘exposing’ inequalities is that they are somehow hidden. The question is - hidden from whom? I grew up in a developing country where I faced prejudice, discrimination and injustices as a daily part of my life. In my native country, I experienced discrimination because I was of the wrong social class; when I immigrated to English-speaking countries, it was because I spoke English with an accent. Don’t these linguists think I have developed the strategies and resources that I need to deal with inequalities in the world?

As a second language speaker of English and a learner of Spanish and German, I have mastered the art of avoiding errors. The less you say in class, the fewer grammar mistakes you make and also the less attention you will get from the teachers. While I really wanted to improve my language skills, the fear of interacting with so-called native English speakers made me anxious and self-conscious. When I am conversing with native speakers of English, the pressure and the nervousness that come from being self-conscious make me commit gaffes. I will never be able to speak like them but ever since I learnt how to speak English, success seems to have always been determined by how closely I can talk or write like a native speaker.

I have always felt grateful when people point out my pronunciation and grammatical errors. That’s an essential part of learning but it would also have been helpful to know that there were things that I did right. It helps me when people point out not just the failures in my communication but also my successes – I learn from both.

Following Lillis (1998: 4), I have juxtaposed the ‘official, public and publicly acceptable within conventions’ version of my motivation for this study with ‘the “other” version which makes public what is not conventional’. I do realise that the ‘other

version' is not what an academic voice is supposed to be like but I felt that it needed to be written into this thesis. As Charmaz and Mitchell Jr. (1997: 212) emphasise,

we need all our words to tell the whole story. [...] we can only stand upon our stories. We do ourselves and our disciplines no service by only telling half-tales, by only reporting finished analyses in temperate voice, by suppressing wonder or perplexity or dread.

While my sense of unease and lingering frustration have transformed into powerful forces in shaping the trajectory of this study, this thesis is not about my own experience. It is about seven Canadian immigrants from India, Congo, Bangladesh, Jordan/Palestine, Haiti and the Philippines and their time together as students of a local college in the western part of Canada. They each had different reasons for leaving their homelands and choosing Canada as their second home. Their lives intersected for twelve weeks (September – November 2009) when they attended the Employment Preparation Programme for Immigrants (EPPI). For three months, they spent six to eight hours in class together, five days a week. The official goal of the EPPI was to equip the immigrants with the skills they need to compete in the Canadian labour market. However, as the data extracts in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 show, alongside the formal aim of the college was its underlying philosophy of building harmonious social relations amongst its teachers and students. The overarching interest of this thesis is therefore to explore how this group of individuals from diverse backgrounds negotiate communication and establish relations using English as a common language.

1.2 WORKING DEFINITIONS: ‘CULTURE’ AND ‘INTERCULTURAL’

1.2.1 Culture

Culture is a very highly contested term so I will not attempt to give a watertight definition but rather a set of working definitions that suit the purposes of this study. Moerman (1993: 87), in his discussion of a particular group of people’s concept of ethnicity, remarks that ‘the principal difference between our professional views and these native ones is that ours are more rigid and obsessive. This is perhaps because we earn our livings and our reputations by thinking, thinking about ethnicity’. Street (1993: 25) emphasises that the meaning of the word ‘culture’ changes and ‘serves different, often competing, purposes at different times’. While equating culture with a set of stable and predetermined characteristics, and national or ethnic origin may seem unfashionably un-academic, it cannot be ignored that the participants in my study do associate culture with geographic origin and ethnic descent. I realise that culture can refer to a variety of ‘cultures’ such as corporate culture, academic culture and so on. It is important to delineate at the outset that my interest lies in ‘culture’ equated with ethnicity and linguistic background. This is not to imply that people who share the same ethnic and linguistic background belong to a homogeneous group. According to Moerman (1993) some of the ‘unordered and incomplete’ commonalities that people who belong to the same ethnic group share are:

- an association with place or territory,
- history and destiny,
- language and such features of cultures as basic values, religion, distinctive traits or practices or ecological definition. (ibid: 88)

The notion of culture that I deploy in this study is captured in the following ‘unordered and incomplete’ conceptualizations:

A fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, *behavioural conventions* and basic assumptions and values that are *shared* by a group of people, and that *influence* each member’s behaviour and each member’s interpretation of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 4, my emphasis).

A set of everyday *practices* and associated beliefs, ideas and values that *characterise a particular community or group, [...] not just as something that people have but also as what they do*: i.e. culture is seen as being actively reproduced, or perhaps challenged, in everyday activity (Swann, Deumert, Lillis and Mesthrie 2004: 68, my emphasis).

A way of life *shared* by a group of people [...] this way of life consists of cultivated, i.e. learnt, behaviours, and [that] these — as well as the experiences that underlie them, and the knowledge or values they are understood to validate — *are accumulated over a period of time and reproduced* even as the members of the group might change. In this way the “culture” of a group ultimately becomes a set of *practices* beliefs and values which are *accepted* relatively unthinkingly by the members of the group (Corder and Meyerhoff 2007: 442-443, my emphasis).

I draw from the above descriptions of culture because they closely match the Communities of Practice framework (Wenger 1998) which I use as a lens to explore my data. The definitions imply that members of a particular culture (just like members of a Community of Practice or CofP) will share common practices, ideas and beliefs that

have been learnt over time and which are actively reproduced and contested everyday. They presuppose the *social* nature of culture and its manifestations in *behavioural conventions* or a *set of practices*. Given that language is one of the principal ways in which culture is transmitted, learnt, and enacted, it follows then that people who share commonalities in beliefs and values accumulated over time, and through repeated interactions will manifest similar communication conventions. As Swann et al. (2004: 68) note, culture is not just something people have but what they *do* which implies that people are not passive receptors of knowledge and practices but are active agents who are able to modify the set of everyday practices they have learnt from older members of their community. I discuss in the next chapter, Section 2.2, this study's treatment of culture as dynamically constructed in interaction.

1.2.2 Intercultural Communication

I use the term intercultural communication/interaction³ in this study to refer to face-to-face interactions between individuals who do not belong to the same culture, as defined above. In other words, these individuals do not share a set of every day practices and assumptions that underlie those practices which include communication conventions: *how* to say *what* to *whom* and *when/where*, turn-taking, use of pauses and back channels, use of prosodic and other paralinguistic signals, and use of linguistic politeness. Although the communication conventions of a specific grouping of people may be observable, the underlying socio-cultural knowledge may not be readily discernible. For example, the use of informal language may be seen as rude in some cultures; in others it may signal friendliness and rapport. Since language is the principal

³ I initially wanted to just use 'interaction', following Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009: 4), because it 'draws our attention to the dynamic nature of behaviour and language in use'. However, it does not quite capture my focus on linguistic analysis.

means by which culture is learnt, produced and reproduced, people from different cultures will have different ways of using language to communicate.

The term ‘intercultural’ is not to be confused with ‘cross cultural’ which refers to the study of different cultures usually for the purpose of comparing how certain sociolinguistic phenomena are manifested. An example of a cross cultural study may involve comparing how the speech act of apologising is linguistically instantiated in Greek and Korean. The Greek- and Korean-speaking participants are not in interaction but are studied separately. In intercultural studies, on the other hand, the individuals or groups from particular cultures are in interaction with each other (Sarangi 1990; Scollon and Scollon 2003). This study deals with research participants from different cultures in face to face interaction with each other; it is therefore mainly concerned with *intercultural communication*.

1.3 LOCATING THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

According to the United Nations International Migration Report (2006), people today, more than at any other point in history, live outside the country of their birth. It is predicted that movements across international borders will continue to gain momentum. As a result of migration flows particularly in the last 50 years, the ethno-cultural makeup of the entire globe has been altered (Blad and Couton 2009). Globalisation⁴, communication technology, and mass migration have changed the world’s linguistic landscape such that English has acquired legitimate status as a global language with non-native speakers outnumbering native speakers (Crystal 2003; Cook and North 2010). As Crystal (2010: 53) reports, 1.5 billion people or a quarter of the world’s population were considered fluent and competent users of English in early 2005, and the

⁴ I do realise that ‘globalisation’ is a contested term in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics. My use here is shorthand for referring to the process of interconnections between countries for social and economic purposes.

number has continued to increase. It must however be taken into account that there are different language varieties and that levels of fluency, competency or proficiency vary according to context.

When people leave their country of origin or residence and migrate to a new country, they make conscious decisions regarding what to bring with them and what to leave behind. They often have to give up their homes, jobs, schools, and a certain lifestyle that they have been accustomed to. They leave family and friends behind. Language is the one thing that they take with them wherever they go, regardless of whether they use it in the new country or not. When people migrate, they come into contact with the unfamiliar ways of the new country and the principal means by which they make sense of their experience is through language. It is through language that they acquire information about what it takes to survive in the new country, make new social connections, apply for jobs and eventually feel adjusted to the country of immigration.

English and French are Canada's two official languages. The students who participated in the current study used a variety of English or French for work and/or education in their countries of origin before they migrated. They also possessed professional certification to practise their areas of expertise in their countries of residence. It would seem that with appropriate job requalification or training, they would be able to get integrated into the job market. However, as Blommaert (2005: 72) suggests 'whenever discourses travel across the globe, what is carried with them is their shape, but their value, meaning or function do not often travel along'. Indeed, the immigrant participants in my study had to learn employment-related discourse that would enable them to compete in the job market. Part of their Business English classes was spent on interview role plays. Below is an excerpt of a handout on 'Conversation Management.'

When you are conducting an informational interview, you must manage the conversation. You are expected to take charge and lead the conversation. If you don't understand, you are expected to ask for clarification and if the speaker is veering off topic, you need to politely steer him or her back on track. It is very important that you manage your time well and not go overtime without permission.

The above excerpt implies that in order to compete in the Canadian employment market, immigrants are expected to acquire the discourse of job application and interviews. They are 'expected to take charge and lead the conversation' and if the employer digresses, the applicants are supposed to 'politely steer him or her back on track' – arguably a tall order for immigrants who cannot depend on previously learnt discourses but are required to learn new ones. It is difficult to say whether or not the participants practised what they learnt in class when they went for real job interviews.

Although this study has focused only on a very specific time and space in the lives of the research participants, the fact that there is a complex interplay between language, migration and the prevailing social and political contexts cannot be ignored. An important point worth making at the outset is that the students and teachers of the EPPI, its administrative staff and the college that runs it are influenced by external factors that are not within their control. Specific employment discourses, as in the excerpt included above, are being taught by the teachers to the students because they have to prepare them for employment. They cannot make employers hire them – that is outside their control; but they can help students acquire discourses that carry a certain 'market value' (Blommaert 2005: 72). As I will explain further in Chapter 3, the EPPI programme was conceptualized as a response to the wider social and political contexts which shaped the curriculum being taught and the criteria used to evaluate the success of the programme. However it can be argued that the EPPI students and their teachers

have the power to create their own responses to the situation utilizing whatever resources and constraints that each situation brings (Wenger 1998: 79). At the heart of this thesis is a focus on the communicative resources that the research participants bring into the interaction and how they deploy these resources to manage potential limitations within the context of the classroom environment.

1.4 EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL GROUNDING

It has been claimed that there are three interconnected processes in any qualitative research – ontology, epistemology and methodology (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 23). I describe my ontological and epistemological stance in this section; I explain how they relate to my methodology in Chapter 3.

It is important to acknowledge that this thesis has been ‘constructed’ in specific ways. It is connected to my personal experience and research motivations as outlined in Section 1.1.1 and Section 1.1.2; second, it is influenced by my PhD supervisors whose guidance I sought throughout this undertaking; reflected in every page of this thesis are the insights of various scholars whose thinking shaped this written piece of work. The reading materials that helped scaffold the crafting of this thesis have been culled from resources that are available and accessible to me (in English and mostly from a ‘Western’ perspective).

The meaning making stance taken here is aligned with an interpretivist epistemology, which, according to Bryman (2008: 17), involves multi-level interpretation: the researcher interpreting the interpretation of the research participants; and then the researcher re-interpreting the interpretations against the scientific concepts, theories and literature of the particular discipline. I also draw from the phenomenological approach, one of the strands of an interpretivist paradigm, which is concerned with ‘trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is

happening to them’ (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009: 3). An interpretivist-phenomenological standpoint resonates with my own view of the research process in two ways: first, its emphasis on understanding how individuals make meaning of their social reality, and how in turn this meaning making influences their behaviour and how they view other people’s behaviour; second, its insistence on privileging the participants’ perspective and the suspension of the researcher’s view of social reality (see Bryman 2008; Smith et al. 2009). This attempt to suspend my own preconceived ideas about social life is reflected in my ethnographically informed methodology which I describe in Chapter 3.

The main question as it relates to ontology is whether there is an objective social reality that exists external to the researcher or whether this social reality is built up from perceptions constructed by the researcher (Bryman 2008). I posit that in practice, researchers are neither just objectivists nor constructionists but may locate themselves within a cline. To illustrate, at the risk of oversimplifying, we could view qualitative research such as ethnography either as a process of *discovery* or as *construction* (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). In the former, the researcher goes to the field site to find out what is *really* going on there so that they could document it; in the latter, it is acknowledged that the researcher’s documentation of field accounts is inevitably, in some ways, a reflection of the researcher’s cultural and interpretative background (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 235). While discovery implies that it is possible to suspend previous hypotheses and assumptions ‘to allow direct contact with reality and the discovery of the truth’, construction suggests not only that researchers ‘can never get access to reality, but also that the “reality” that ethnographers document is no less a construction than the accounts produced by the people they study’ (ibid: 236).

My position is somewhere in the middle of the discovery-construction continuum. I tried to maintain an attitude of openness, suspending my pre-conceived notions of ‘reality’ so that I could prepare myself to ‘discover’ the truth. However, I was at the same time acutely aware that what was observed in the research site and the field work accounts in this thesis have been inevitably influenced by my own cultural background. Indeed, the constructed knowledge that is produced in this thesis is mediated by my personal attributes and circumstances: female, married, grew up in the Philippines, native speaker of *Tagalog* with English as a second language, a Canadian immigrant. Another researcher who is a single Caucasian male, native speaker of French, in his early twenties and who has had no experience of immigration might produce a different type of knowledge. It can be argued that the research participants will likely interact with him differently. For example he might have been able to build into the analysis the interactions between the two French-speaking participants who sometimes used French with each other at lunch breaks.

It has been claimed that in order to overcome the biasing effect of the researcher’s cultural background, researchers can engage in a process called ‘decentring’ which refers to ‘the process of moving away from the researcher’s perspective so that more equal weight is given to various cultural perspectives’ (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 328). What this implies is that there is an Archimedean standpoint whereby researchers can strip themselves of their own cultural biases. It implies that researchers, particularly those in the social sciences, are expected to be somehow superior to ordinary humans in that they can detach themselves from their culturally-conditioned perspective. I find this position difficult to accept. I would argue that as embodied social beings, we cannot help but bring our own biographies and subjectivities to the field of inquiry, which in turn affects the questions we ask and how we go about seeking the answers (Cameron,

Frazer, Harvey, Rampton and Richardson 1992; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Interwoven throughout this thesis is my attempt to account for the researcher's presence in the data. As I show in some data extracts, I was part of the interaction, and instead of obscuring my presence, I use my insights as a 'participant' to strengthen the analysis.

1.5 OVERVIEW AND ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

1.5.1 The Study and its Aims

This study involved observing a group of adult immigrants (and their Canadian teachers) who were attending a 12-week career and employment preparation class for newcomers to Canada. It draws from ethnographically informed data collection practices. The principal method used was participant observation with audio recording supplemented by observation notes, semi-structured interviews and documentary evidence in the form of classroom handouts, photographs and publicly available documents. This thesis, whose overarching research question and sub-questions are presented in Section 3.4.2, attempts to present a comprehensive picture of intercultural communication particularly the much neglected area of what goes right in intercultural encounters. It explores data extracts that show how the immigrant participants of the EPPI, all non-native speakers of English, achieve their communication goals in spite of challenges that may be imposed by limited linguistic knowledge and/or differences of communication conventions. Through selected extracts from transcriptions of audio recordings, this thesis endeavours to show what people in specific contexts actually do rather than starting from assumptions about how they are expected to interact based on *a priori* criteria.

Furthermore, this thesis aims to put to the test the widely held notion that intercultural communication is prone to misunderstanding, susceptible to breakdowns

and by nature, quite problematic. While I do not underestimate the potential challenges and difficulties that might arise in encounters among individuals from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it is important not to overlook the ‘innovative potential’ (Piller 2000) of communication across cultures. Thus, this study pays special attention to instances when speakers are able to activate communicative resources and deploy effective strategies to make communication work. As Verschueren (2008) argues, ‘though focusing on instances of miscommunication is a useful research strategy [...], successful intercultural communication is an equally interesting phenomenon to look at, as it reveals actual processes of meaning negotiation’ (ibid: 30).

While collecting and analysing my data, I was very much aware that my interest in ‘what goes right’ in intercultural settings might prevent me from paying attention to ‘what goes wrong.’ Thus one of the analysis chapters, Chapter 6, was intended to explore what might go wrong in intercultural encounters; it also unpacks the repair strategies that the research participants deploy to repair potential misunderstanding. Indeed, I do not think it would help to move current theorizing forward by simply presenting the opposite of what the other camp holds to be true. It is hoped that this thesis will be able to add to a more comprehensive picture of intercultural communication with its flaws and imperfections as well as its associated rewards and successes. In these days of increasing contact among people from diverse backgrounds, there is an urgent need to ‘create intercultural understanding and cooperation on a scale never before achieved’ (Young 1996: 1).

1.5.2 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis has three parts and seven chapters. Part I is comprised of Chapters 1, 2, and 3 which set the scene for the study. Part II consists of Chapters 4, 5 and 6 which are the data analysis chapters, and Part III is the Conclusion. The present chapter discussed

the driving force behind the study, the use of the terms ‘culture’ and ‘intercultural communication’ in this thesis, the wider research context and the writer’s epistemological and ontological underpinnings.

Chapter 2 compares and contrasts two approaches in the study of intercultural communication. Both views are necessary in the understanding of the multidimensional nature of intercultural communication. But while one approach focuses on how differences of communication conventions make communication across cultures problematic and susceptible to misunderstanding, the other view puts the spotlight on how speakers, using English as a common language, manage communication by actively using strategies such as collaboration and by sharing responsibility for meaning making. Chapter 2 also provides a review of studies in intercultural contexts, both ‘what works’ and ‘what does not work’. Drawing from findings from relevant literature and an exploratory study undertaken before the main data collection, this chapter looks into interactional/relational use of language that facilitates communication. The heuristic device I employ as a way of talking about my data is also explained.

Chapter 3 describes my methodology, the research site, the research participants and field work procedures. In this chapter I also account for the decisions taken in the conduct of this research: why the particular research site was chosen, why the particular extracts were selected for analysis and how I account for the validity of my interpretation.

Part II consists of the three data analyses chapters: Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Each chapter begins with a brief review of literature that specifically relates to the analytic focus of the particular chapter. Chapter 4, ‘Laying the Foundations of Common Ground: Building One Team, One Family’ defines ‘common ground’, a data-driven concept derived from the participants’ perspective. I explain my use of ‘common ground’ to

refer to a combination of the EPPI group's shared knowledge, relational identity, in-group membership and 'affective convergence'. Chapter 4 sets up the interpretative context for both Chapters 4 and Chapter 5. It analyses data extracts taken from the first four weeks of the EPPI programme when the students and participants began to lay the ground work for mutual engagement. In this chapter I show how the participants start to crystallize their notion of a joint enterprise.

Chapter 5 'Maintaining Common Ground: Working Together Hand in Hand', follows the chronological narrative of the students and teachers of the EPPI as they enact and maintain common ground which they established in the first month of the programme. It analyses extracts taken from the fifth week to the last day of the 12-week classroom phase. The temporal dimension built into the analysis enables the researcher to see the multifunctionality and different dimensions of common ground. This chapter also describes the development of in-group language and in-group identity markers. Data extracts provide evidence that norms of social interaction have already been established.

While the interpretative base in Chapters 4 and 5 were strengthened by a temporal dimension, Chapter 6 draws from extended stretches of talk from the whole corpus. Methodologically, I claim in Chapter 6 that the positive side of 'miscommunication' can be uncovered after observing the stretches of talk following the miscommunication episode. The main argument the chapter makes is that miscommunication can lead to fruitful and positive outcome if participants are willing to work at repair.

Part III consists of Chapter 7, the Conclusion. It discusses the connection between common ground and intercultural communication, outlines the key insights and

contributions to knowledge generated from the study, the successes and limitations of the methodology, and suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

My opinion is that the major problem is language, education experience [...] and discrimination is not too much, maybe a little bit.

Faisal, research participant

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter is divided into six sections. In Section 2.2, I extend the discussion started in the previous chapter on culture and intercultural interaction. Section 2.3 discusses two types of approaches which have been used to give us insights into intercultural communication: interethnic communication and *lingua franca* communication. I argue that whereas the former illuminates what makes communication break down, the latter broadens the horizon by exploring what it is that interactants do to make communication successful in spite of potential cultural and linguistic differences. Section 2.4 explores the ‘relational’ factors that influence social interactions. Section 2.5 explains how I am going to deploy the Communities of Practice model as a heuristic device. Section 2.6 gives a summary of the key points of the chapter.

2.2 CULTURE AND INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION

In the previous chapter I discussed how the terms *culture* and *intercultural communication* are used in this study. In this section, I describe my view of culture as being both fixed and fluid, that while individuals reproduce culture, they also in turn shape and reshape it; the relationship between people as cultural beings and culture is mutually shaping. I also discussed in Section 1.2.1 how ethnicity is entangled with culture. As already mentioned, people who identify themselves as belonging to the same ethnic group share commonalities such as an association with a place, history, language,

basic values, world views and practices (Moerman 1993). A notion often enmeshed with ethnicity is 'race', an extraordinarily problematic but an unavoidable term because of its inextricable link with ethnicity and culture. 'Race' sits uncomfortably in contemporary academic discussions because of its negative associations with the hugely disputed pseudo-scientific classifications of people according to biological characteristics and genetic lineage. However, it must be acknowledged that 'racially charged' physical categorisations of people such as 'black,' 'yellow,' 'Caucasian,' and 'white/non-white' are still deployed relatively unquestioningly in everyday discussions.

'Race' and ethnicity are social and cultural constructs so they do not have fixed referents; their meanings constantly shift, being conflated or differentiated depending on the prevailing discourse of situated historical contexts (Harris and Rampton 2003; Street 1993; Spencer 2006). Indeed, it is impossible to tease apart the differences between the two without the danger of reifying these very terms (see Back and Solomos 2000; Harris and Rampton 2003 for a useful discussion).

Thrown into the muddled waters of cultural terminology is 'nationality' which can be conceived as a sense of belonging to a nation by virtue of birth or naturalization. A person's sense of belonging to a nation may of course be strongly tied to ethnicity (alongside other factors such as religion, language, regional background, political loyalties and so on). There are a lot of leakages between 'race', ethnicity and nationality which are reflected in the inconsistency with which they are treated in the literature. As constituents of a person's identity repertoire, they intersect with other categories such as gender, age, socio-economic status, educational attainment, and religion. This means that being a 23-year old, single, Catholic, working-class, female Nicaraguan will be experienced and articulated differently in different situations. Being female might be the most salient one moment, and then being Nicaraguan or being Catholic, the next.

Indeed, there are a huge number of potentially salient aspects of a person's identity involving enormously complicated processes of blurring, merging, contestation, negotiation and hybridization. I return to identity in Section 4.2.2.

Another dimension of complexity in pinning down culture as part of an individual's identity lies in the difference between researcher/participant categories and between participant/participant categories. For example, while I was chatting to two female participants at the beginning of my fieldwork, I said 'so you are both from India.' One participant answered in the affirmative; the other immediately corrected me and said, 'No, I am from the North and she is from the South. We are very different – language, religion, food, dress, everything!' In other words, 'India' carries a multitude of simultaneous meanings: a nation, a geographic location, a specific region, a way of life and practices shared by a group of people, and so on.

Angouri (2010: 09) proposes that culture can be viewed from a macro-level or a constructivist approach; the former treats individuals as passive bearers of a stable set of characteristics and identities that they share with a group of people while the latter takes a view of culture as a process, always dynamic and in flux. Holliday (1999: 248) uses 'small culture' to refer to 'a dynamic, ongoing group process which operates in changing circumstances.' Consonant with this approach is the perspective that identities are discursively constructed and individuals are able to invoke any of those identities during the interaction. Indeed, there seems to be a growing recognition amongst scholars that identities are played out constantly 'out of *interaction* and out of the dominant and conflictual knowledge and assumptions that circulate within society' (Roberts 1998: 109-10, my emphasis). Taken from this perspective, culture becomes less abstract, less essentialized and more contextually dependent, being manifest out of the 'culture brought in' and 'culture brought about' (Roth and Roth 1999: 210).

As Blommaert (1998) argues, ‘all kinds of things happen in the interaction itself: adaptation is often mutual, people shift into a medium which is no one's property, cultural conventions get sacrificed in a split second while others are given overwhelming prominence’. Moerman (1993: 94) echoes a similar sentiment when referring to ethnicity, which I would argue is applicable to culture, as being ‘always a production, a practical accomplishment, always the creature of particular circumstances, always a web of processes and their relationships’. In Clifford’s (1999: 12) words, ‘I do not accept that anyone is permanently fixed by his or her “identity”; but neither can one shed specific structures of race and culture, class and caste, gender and sexuality, environment and history’.

The notion of culture discussed above takes into consideration that any one person is simultaneously a member of different cultures which can include professional affiliations, social status, educational achievements, and religious or political allegiances. Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009: 15) offer some guidelines that I find helpful in understanding the complexities of culture. They point out that:

- culture is manifested through different types of regularities, some of which are more explicit than others;
- culture is associated with social groups, but no two individuals within a group share exactly the same cultural characteristics;
- culture affects people’s behaviour and interpretations of behaviour;
- culture is acquired and/or constructed through interaction with others.

Since culture is manifested in unpredictable ways, it is crucial therefore, in this study to make the interaction between dyads or multi-party interaction as the unit of analysis. As Carbaugh, in an interview with Berry (Berry 2009: 231), states, culture is ‘presumed and practiced [sic] in social interaction, as something people do in social

situations’. Although Carbaugh acknowledges that conversations are to some degree shaped by the culture of the interacting parties, he notes that ‘any application of culture [...] is in some sense an individual application, and each individual varies to some degree in how he or she communicates culturally’ (Berry 2009: 231). In other words, interactions can be viewed as ‘culturally shaped, socially negotiated, and individually applied’ (ibid). Taken from a linguistic perspective, Halliday (1984: 9) notes:

the ongoing process of linguistic choice whereby a speaker is selecting within the resources of the linguistic system, are effectively cultural choices, and acts of meaning are cultural acts. We are, no doubt, “free” to mean as we choose - and culture can be defined as how far our freedom of meaning is constrained, the extent to which people's acts of meaning depart from this idealized randomness.

Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009: 39) also emphasise people’s agency to strategically deploy or stretch the limits of cultural practices based upon their objectives and motivations. As the data examples in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 show, individual speakers who come from different cultural backgrounds ‘do’ culture in myriads of ways – they may adopt critical attitudes towards their cultural background to evoke solidarity, or they may foreground/downplay aspects of their cultural identities to achieve in-group membership. In other words, they use culture as a resource.

2.3 APPROACHES TO INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

In this section, I discuss interethnic communication and *lingua franca* communication which I categorize as two different approaches to the study of intercultural communication. While the former argues that misunderstandings frequently occur when individuals from different backgrounds attempt to communicate,

the latter tells us that instances of misunderstanding in *lingua franca* interactions are not very frequent and when they do occur, they are almost always resolved. Interethnic studies tend to focus on factors that cause communication breakdowns and failures; *lingua franca* studies provide us insights into communicative successes. It will become clearer in the discussion below that research contexts and researcher interests in interethnic and *lingua franca* studies differ, which account for the differences in findings. Insights from both perspectives are necessary if we are to have a comprehensive understanding of what it takes to communicate across cultures.

2.3.1 Interethnic Communication

I retain the term ‘interethnic’ communication, as used by Gumperz (1982) to refer to interactions between individuals from different ‘ethnic’ groups. An ethnic group, in my understanding of Gumperz, consists of individuals who have been socialized, through a long and intensive history of interaction with close personal networks, into a certain set of communicative norms. In the interethnic sense then, an Athabaskan is an individual who has been socialized since early childhood in communicative patterns which have their roots in the Athabaskan languages (Scollon and Scollon 1979: 3). As already mentioned in Section 2.2, ‘ethnic/ethnicity’ is used differently in the literature reflecting the researcher’s varying goals and interests as well as the specific historical situations. Gumperz’s use foregrounds shared language background and associated conventions as a key constituent of membership in an ethnic group.

Some of the most frequently cited works in communication between people from different ethnic backgrounds have come from Gumperz and Tannen (1979), Scollon and Scollon (1979; 1981), Gumperz (1982; 2001a; 2003), Tannen, (1981;1984) and Roberts, Davies and Jupp (1992). It is claimed that a primary motivation of the ‘interethnic interactional sociolinguistics’ school (a term used by Sarangi (1990: 146) to

refer to the Gumperzian school) was to use discourse analysis to expose problems caused by differences of communication conventions which can be traced back to differences of linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Scollon and Scollon 2003). The emphasis inevitably deals with situations where conflict and inequality (e.g. gatekeeping encounters) are interactionally realised through discourse.

I draw heavily from the work of Gumperz because of the impact and the influence he has had in the study of intercultural communication both theoretically and methodologically (Roberts et al. 1992: 99). Gumperz investigated situations of cultural contact where the interactants' use of communication conventions failed to work, that is, although speakers provided hearers with cues on how they wanted their message interpreted, the hearers missed or misread these cues so that miscommunication occurred. The central premise of interethnic communication is that communication conventions are learnt unconsciously very early in childhood through an intensive process of socialization and daily interactions with persons from the same ethnic background (Scollon and Scollon 1979; Gumperz 1982). These conventions - the way we convey our ideas, opinions, emotion, and social relations with the hearer including tone of voice to indicate emphasis, knowledge of when to take a turn, when to listen or interrupt, and how to signal politeness - are deemed to be very difficult to change (Scollon and Scollon 1979). As Gumperz (2003: 268) argues:

we have ways of signalling whether we expect somebody to know what we're talking about or whether we're saying something new to them. Now these signals of tone of voice are automatic; they're something we use without thinking. But they're also conventional because they're shared by people of the same group and they're different for people of different backgrounds.

Janney and Arndt (2005:38) also argue that ‘cultural differences in communicative styles and strategies are embedded in, and supported by, unquestioned cultural assumptions that are difficult to change’. One aspect of communication conventions identified by Gumperz to be a frequent source of misunderstanding between people from different ethnic⁵ backgrounds is the use of contextualization cues. A contextualization cue refers to ‘any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signalling of contextual presuppositions’ (Gumperz 1982: 131) and includes intonation, rhythm, pitch, pausing, and voice quality (Roberts et al. 1992: 90). These cues are deployed by the speaker to guide the listener in how they want what they say to be interpreted. If the hearer misses the cues, as to the intended interpretation of the speaker, then misunderstanding occurs. What makes communication particularly challenging between people from different ethnic backgrounds is that these contextualization cues have been claimed to escape conscious detection by interlocutors, thus, not amenable to repair during the interaction (Roberts et al. 1992). As Gumperz (2003: 273) emphasises, ‘when people do not share [these] linguistic conventions, the kind of minor misunderstanding which would hardly bother people with similar conventions becomes dangerous because the very means that you use to repair a misunderstanding or error are themselves misunderstood’.

To illustrate one consequence of mismatched conventions, Gumperz (1982) used the widely known ‘gravy’ example involving airport cafeteria servers of Pakistani and Indian descent. He noted that the newly hired Indian and Pakistani female servers were perceived as impolite and rude by their supervisors and the cargo handlers whom they served. After an ethnographic investigation, it was concluded that the unfavourable

⁵ I prefer to use the term ‘linguistic’ background but I retain Gumperz’s use of ethnic to refer to early socialization into a specific language.

impression towards the Indian and Pakistani servers was a result of differing interpretations of falling intonation. The cafeteria servers used the word 'gravy' with a falling instead of a rising intonation. It is claimed that the fall in the intonation was interpreted by the customers as a statement (This is gravy.) rather than as an offer (Would you like some gravy?). The cafeteria servers were then made aware of the unintended rudeness in their intonation by their supervisors and an English teacher, after which improvements were noticed in their attitude towards their work and their customers. It has been argued, however, that 'the problem at hand is not one of communication on the part of workers but rather one of perception on the part of the supervisors and clients' (Singh, Lele and Martohardjono 1988: 46). The implication being made here is that there is an interpretative bias on the part of the analyst such that the perspective of the dominant, more powerful group tends to be privileged. Since they view falling intonation as rude and impolite (unintentionally from the perspective of the cafeteria servers), it was expected that the Pakistani and Indian servers were the ones who had to change their intonation instead of the supervisors changing their perception of falling intonation. As Sarangi (1990: 147) puts it, what Gumperz and his followers 'fail to recognise, however, is the fact that they, as analysts, adopt a "cultural dominance" approach which allows them to interpret inter-ethnic communication with their own cultural bias'.

Another case studied by Gumperz (1982) concerns a job training counselling session between a Pakistani male teacher and a British female staff member of a government funded employment centre. In spite of efforts by both parties and their repeated attempts to achieve mutual understanding, communication still broke down. It is of interest that the Pakistani teacher, born in South Asia, is said to have attended secondary school and university in England. This implies that despite having spent

years in England and in an English educational system, he somehow failed to adjust or make himself acquainted with some of the British discursive styles and practices. Even if we subscribe to Gumperz's and Scollon and Scollon's argument that it is very hard to change the way we communicate, we might expect that the teacher had broadened his communicative repertoire after years of attending British educational institutions. It is also suggested that the British staff member continued to interpret the teacher's utterances according to her ethnocentric socio-cultural background. We might have expected that due to the nature of her position, she might have been exposed to people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and thus would have been open to accommodation strategies. But as Gumperz claims, the conventions and processes that we all learnt through repeated interactions within a particular community become our default 'automatic' mode in interaction. They are practised on a subconscious level and they cannot easily be changed and are carried over when we learn another language.

It can be argued that the view of intercultural communication from an interethnic perspective appears rather gloomy. As Fox (1997: 87) states: 'what a pessimistic, and dangerous, view it is to dismiss the possibility of creating situations where two people, or groups of people, from very different cultures, can get together and achieve real understanding'. Indeed, the interethnic view offers little hope for immigrants who need to learn the language of the host country to apply for jobs, attend schools and participate actively in social situations. Even if the native speakers of the dominant culture accommodate to the non-native speaker and show willingness to cooperate, their default mode of communication will supposedly get in the way of mutual understanding. I argue, following McDermott and Gospodinoff (2003), that 'our communicative codes, [...] do not turn us into communicative robots incapable of coming to grips with other

people simply because they communicate differently. The social world is subject to negotiation' (ibid: 278).

The interethnic communication perspective has been challenged by other scholars (see Singh et al. 1988; Meeuwis 1994; Meeuwis and Sarangi 1994; Sarangi 1994; Shea 1994) for having ignored socio-historical practice, power, and institutional racism as factors in interethnic miscommunication, and for interpretative bias. As Singh et al. (1988: 52) point out, Gumperz's interethnic approach 'discourages the use of universally available principles of human decency, including decency in communication which requires [...] that we attribute the same rationality to our interlocutor that we would attribute to ourselves'. They add that 'what is often presented as the "linguistic evidence" for miscommunication in such contexts is in fact, [...] the locus of the violations of the cooperative principles of discourse and human interaction' (Singh et al. 1998: 52).

It would be imprudent to assume that a person's ethnic and cultural background (as a form of early socialization) do not exert an influence on communication. However, I argue that when culture-specific traits are attributed to speakers, researchers may fail to consider the fact that 'individual interactants make "discoursal" choices on the basis of their sociocultural experience on the one hand and the communicative demands the interactional context makes on them on the other' (Sarangi 1990: 155). As I have argued in my discussion of culture above, interactions may be culturally shaped but they are socially negotiated and individually applied. For example, in Rampton's (2005) study of adolescents from different ethnic groups, it was shown that participants can switch into a contextually marked variety of language associated with members of other ethnic or social groups that the speakers do not normally belong to. This suggests that boundaries of ethnicity are porous and allows for many leakages (Blommaert 1998). I suggest that

the communication conventions we learnt from our formative years intersect with the multiple identities made salient in the interaction, as well as with the fluid contexts and goals of the ongoing talk. Thus, difference in ethnic communication style in the fashion of Gumperz and colleagues, is just one of several factors that may lead to miscommunication. In the next section I provide a brief survey of studies that provide insights into the different factors that contribute to the potentially problematic nature of intercultural communication.

2.3.1.1 Related Studies: Problematic Aspects of Intercultural Communication

Understanding between interlocutors with similar histories, experiences and world knowledge is believed to be much easier than between those who lack common backgrounds (Gumperz 1982; Scollon and Scollon 2001; Tannen 2005). In intercultural encounters, Tannen (1984) claims that practically anything can go wrong due to differences in interlocutors' conception of when to talk, what to say, pacing and pausing, listenership, intonation, formulaicity, and indirectness. For example, the different meanings which people attribute to silence (Nakane 2006) and length and frequency of pauses in speech (Tryggvason 2006) can result in misinterpretation. Additionally, people from different linguistic backgrounds may organise discourse differently (Scheu-Lottgen and Hernandez-Campoy 1998) and have conflicting discourse management styles (Mauranen 2006). And as has been pointed out by various scholars, difference in pragmatic and sociocultural orientation (Thomas 1984; Varonis and Gass 1985; Gass and Varonis 1991; Mauranen 2006; Zamborlin 2007) can make intercultural communication a minefield.

The problematic aspects of intercultural encounters have also received a lot of focus in international business communication research - with the spotlight being directed on failures, thus leaving the successes in the shadow (Poncini 2003; Pullin-

Stark 2007). Of particular relevance to my research is a study in Canada involving migrants, overseas workers and international students. Mak, Westwood, Ishiyama and Barker (1999) claim that the attainment of career and educational goals by newcomers to Canada can be hampered by the difference in social values, roles and interpersonal relations. As they argue, ‘the extent to which highly qualified immigrants and expatriate workers are able to transfer their occupational skills and potential for career success often rests largely on whether they can continue to be *socially effective* in the new country’ (Mak et al. 1999: 78, my emphasis). For example, immigrants who may dismiss ‘small talk’ as just talk might prefer to work during meals and coffee breaks, thus missing out on opportunities for building social relationships. In British settings, the lack of knowledge of culturally sanctioned interview discourse has been pointed out as one of the reasons why foreign-born applicants do not perform well in job interviews. In their study of British job interviews, Campbell and Roberts (2007) report that foreign-born candidates who are non-native speakers of English, were less successful in getting hired than their white British and British minority ethnic counterparts. They claim that foreign-born applicants lack knowledge in effectively juxtaposing personal and informal talk with institutional discourse. I return to this point later in the Methodology section in my discussion of research context.

2.3.1.2 ‘Ideologically-induced’ Optimism

Young (1996: 84) interrogates a ‘methodologically-induced’ pessimism in empirical studies dealing with cultural differences. He states that such studies start with recruiting participants from different cultural groups. Then the researcher analyses the social interactions, identifies problems relating to communication and then traces back the root cause of these problems to cultural differences. In the first place, he maintains, it was on the basis of stereotypes about cultural membership that the subjects in the

studies were recruited. It is suggested that a methodologically induced pessimism is reinforced because of the ‘focus on the source of communication difficulties rather than sources of hope for overcoming them’ (ibid).

It is not my intention to underestimate the difficulties that may arise when people from different backgrounds try to establish mutual understanding. It can be argued, however, that while we have our own previously learnt ways of communicating, we also design our utterances according to our inferences about the person we are communicating with. The field of intercultural communication has undoubtedly benefited from the knowledge offered by the studies reviewed above. But as Saville-Troike (2003: 168) proposes, ‘the unmarked but far more common cases of skilled, artful, and successful cross cultural interaction’ also need to be mined for their insights. I argue that examining the less problematic aspects of intercultural encounters is indeed an equally important area of investigation (Chiang 2009; Ryoo 2005).

In these days of more frequent contact between individuals from different cultural and linguistic inheritances, I suggest that there is urgency in exploring what makes communication go right. A little bit of ‘ideologically-induced’ optimism is probably justifiable to account for the much neglected ‘positive’ aspects of communication across cultures. In the next section, I explore findings in *lingua franca* studies, which give a very different picture from the type of intercultural interactions often described from an interethnic perspective. It is important though to keep in mind that the differences between the two approaches are attributable to research contexts which I return to later in Section 2.3.2.3.

2.3.2 *Lingua Franca* Communication in English

Until recently, communication among non-native speakers of English has been largely ignored (Meierkord 2000). Of notable exception are studies dealing with English as a common language of communication for native speakers of other languages. Indeed, English has grown as the language of communication across the globe (Crystal 2003; Svartvik and Leech 2006; Georgieva 2009).

Lingua franca refers to the language used by speakers of different languages who do not share the same mother tongue, and who are therefore non-native speakers of the language that they use to communicate with each other (Firth 1996; Seidlhofer 2001; Meierkord 2007). However in contrast with other *lingua francas* and due to the global presence of English, this strict definition seems to have loosened. Some researchers may consider encounters with English as a *lingua franca* - interactions between individuals where none of the speakers speak English as a native language - to include native speakers of the language (Dewey and Jenkins 2010: 73). I apply the term *lingua franca* in this study as ‘any form of language serving as a means of communication between speakers of different languages’ (Swann, et al. 2004: 184). Thus, although the Canadian teachers in my study are native speakers of Canadian English, I characterize their interaction with the non-native English speaking students as a type of *lingua franca* encounter. As Georgieva (2009: 293) proposes, even native speakers of English use a form of international English to attain a sufficient level of mutual understanding when speaking to non-native speakers of the language. In Section 6.3, I show instances of the Canadian teachers checking to make sure that students understand certain English words or idiomatic expressions before they use them in class. They might not have done the same checking for understanding had they been in interaction with other Canadian English native speakers. In this sense, it can be assumed

that their language was designed with their non-native hearers in mind. As already mentioned in Chapter 1, I use *non-native* to refer to users of English who were socialized from childhood into language/es other than English.

2.3.2.1 English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF) or *Lingua Franca* English (LFE)

In the last decade, two strands of thinking have seemed to pre-occupy English *lingua franca* researchers, the question being, to codify ELF or not? The move to describe and codify ELF is motivated by the need to legitimise it as a language in its own right, not as a deficient approximation of English as spoken by its native speakers (see Jenkins 2000; Seidlhofer, 2001; Modiano 2003; Huebner, Boehringer, and Seidlhofer 2008). For instance, there has been a growing interest amongst ELF researchers (see Jenkins, Modiano and Seidlhofer 2001; Modiano 2003) to describe ‘Euro English,’ as an emerging variety of ELF spoken in mainland Europe. What this means is that Euro English will have its own rules of correctness and accuracy which will not derive from a native English variety (Jenkins et al. 2001). However, Mollin (2007) seems less convinced that Euro English has achieved more than a learner language status and thus, cannot be viewed as a legitimate language variety in same way that Indian, Singaporean or West African Englishes are. Indeed, the push towards codification has had its share of criticism. Other researchers contend that *lingua franca* English defies description and codification because of its highly variable and context-dependent nature. It is argued that ELF does not exist before the interaction – it emerges and is created in real time through the moment by moment exchange of utterances by speakers (Meierkord 2004; Canagarajah 2007; Firth 2009; Georgieva 2009; Otsuji and Pennycook 2010). Canagarajah (2007) uses the term LFE⁶ (as opposed to ELF) to

⁶ I use LFE to refer to the work of Canagarajah but retain ELF to refer to the work of other researchers who do not make a distinction between the two terms.

dissociate this from the move towards codification and to emphasise the need to focus on pragmatics of communication rather than ELF as a ‘language system’ (Georgieva 2009: 294). LFE, according to Canagarajah (2007: 926), is hybrid in nature – speakers combine different lexical and grammatical structures, and discourse conventions from varied English varieties and languages; it is not ‘a product located in the mind’ but a ‘form of social action’ (ibid: 928) so it defies description. Since the focus of this thesis is on the analysis of verbal interactions between speakers, I am more interested in examining the use of English as a *lingua franca* in social practice. This thesis explores ‘conversational sequences’ and interactions between participants rather than ‘utterances as texts’ (Georgieva 2009: 296).

Based on the evidence from my data and my analytic emphasis on situated interactions and practices, this study dissociates itself from the move to codify ELF (but see Seidlhofer 2001; Dewey and Jenkins 2010). Indeed, my data analysis in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 show not only the fluidity and negotiability of form, but also the participants’ creation of new words which acquire and carry their meaning when used in very specific contexts.

In spite of their opposing views, ELF and LFE scholars seem to agree that interactions involving speakers of English as a *lingua franca* are largely successful, harmonious, collaborative, and with infrequent occurrences of misunderstanding. Below, I review some related studies that have been a source of relevant insights in making sense of my data. I do not make a distinction between ELF- or LFE-aligned research because my focus is on exploring the question ‘how do the *lingua franca* speakers make communication work despite differences in cultural and linguistic backgrounds?’

2.3.2.2 Making Communication Work in *Lingua Franca* Interactions

I first give a brief overview of research carried out in academic settings and then I explore studies in business contexts. In a study of face-to-face group conversations collected in a student hall of residence for overseas students (17 different mother tongues with different levels of English proficiency) in Great Britain, Meierkord (1998; 2000) noted that it was the participants' concern for face saving and a mutually supportive attitude that enabled them to overcome potential linguistic barriers. Face consideration was demonstrated by refraining from saying or doing anything that might be offensive to the conversation partner, and by avoiding words unfamiliar to the listener. It was observed that a supportive attitude was instantiated through laughter instead of back channels, which helped establish a friendly and cooperative environment. Meierkord postulates that uncertainty regarding cultural norms or standards seems to activate an attitude of benevolence amongst the students. When this attitude of benevolence is in operation, it makes it possible for linguistic and pragmatic gaffes to be seen as an error rather than an offense (Aston 1993: 229). To connect this to our previous discussion of the 'gravy' example in Section 2.3.1, a 'benevolent take' would allow for the interpretation of the falling intonation as pragmatic error rather than as an indication of rudeness or impoliteness.

In her study involving students and university support staff, House (2003) claims that participants demonstrated a strong desire for social cohesion and consensus orientation; they used their previously learnt communicative strategies (e.g. echoing, mirroring and shadowing) to facilitate the smooth flow of the talk. It was also observed that misunderstandings were very few despite the transfer of mother tongue language conventions into *lingua franca*. This observation that misunderstandings between *lingua franca* speakers are infrequent is corroborated by the findings of other researchers such

as Meierkord (1998), Seidlhofer (2004), Mauranen (2006), Firth (2009), and Georgieva (2009). Interlocutors are shown to be able to import culturally relative pragmatic strategies into the on-going intercultural interaction (House 2003), which brings into question the common assumption that homogeneity is crucial to successful communication (Canagarajah 2006: 284). Another reason, according to Mauranen (2006), why miscommunication is not as frequent as might be expected in *lingua franca* contexts lies in the speakers' tendency to anticipate potential problems – they realise the inherent challenge in achieving mutual understanding so they may be more proactive in their use of communicative strategies (e.g. asking for more information, repetition of problematic items, confirmation checks, and interactive repair).

Georgieva (2009) analysed a classroom conversation between an English native speaker and twelve Bulgarian language students. She found that her participants seemed to place a high priority on interpersonal relationships demonstrated by 'a concerted effort to push the conversation forward by ironing out interpersonal friction and establishing firm situational co-membership' (ibid: 303). I show in Chapters 4 and 5 that the participants in my study also foreground harmonious interpersonal relationships.

In business contexts, a number of studies show that individuals are able to achieve their transactional goals relatively unhampered by their linguistic limitations and cultural differences. Firth (2009: 156), whose research involved telephone business interactions between Danish and Lebanese businessmen, maintains that speakers tend to 'focus away from the surface form of language production and focus instead on accomplishing transcendent interpersonal meaning'. He notes that although the conversations were characterized by disorderly turn-taking, marked collocations, and non-standard pronunciations, the shared goal of reaching agreements seemed to have

provided an ideal context for organising the talks (Firth 2009: 152). In an earlier paper, Firth (1996) introduced the notion of the ‘let it pass’ principle, that is the speaker’s behaviour to gloss over possible misunderstanding, instead of explicitly halting the interaction to negotiate meaning. It is argued that the ‘let it pass’ strategy is what gives *lingua franca* interactions an appearance of being collaborative and consensus-oriented.

Pitzl (2005), in her study of *lingua franca* business meetings, claims that interlocutors demonstrate an ability to negotiate meaning without disrupting the smooth flow of the talk. For example, when speakers respond to the interlocutor’s signal for the negotiation of meaning, they do so in a manner that does not jar the smooth rhythm of the interaction. Other *lingua franca* studies in the workplace highlight the socially cohesive and rapport building quality of the interactions (see Planken 2005; Pullin-Stark 2007).

The studies reviewed above highlight a number of relevant points. First, misunderstandings are not as frequent as one might expect; second, interactants display a strong desire to preserve harmonious relations by showing consideration for each other’s face; third, communication success does not equate with linguistic proficiency, shared background or similarity in discursive strategies but with the willingness to cooperate and reach a consensus. What other factors might contribute to success in communication between people who do not share the same first language or cultural background? While Seidlhofer (2004: 218) posits that there seems to be in operation ‘a kind of suspension of expectations regarding norms’ in ELF encounters, House (2003: 569) suggests a ‘we’re in the same boat’ principle that gets activated when non-native speakers of a language attempt to communicate. Mauranen (2006: 141) hypothesises that the speakers’ awareness of their differences in linguistic and cultural background activates the principle of charity and a kind of suspension of disbelief. In other words,

when there is a mishearing of an utterance, the hearer tries to work out a meaningful and relevant interpretation. She adds that since speakers are very much aware of the possibility of misunderstanding, they may tend to simplify their language to prevent misunderstanding. Put another way, *lingua franca* speakers can be seen to be motivated by a mutual desire to assume shared responsibility for meaning making and accommodation. Canagarajah (2007: 932) contends that multilinguals tend to be more open to unexpected deviations and infelicities so that ‘contextual cues for alignment’ are easily facilitated. According to Firth (2009: 163-164), successful *lingua franca* interactions appear to be underpinned by ‘communicative alignment, adaptation, local accommodation and attunement’.

The *lingua franca* studies reviewed in this section reinforce McDermott and Gospodinoff’s (2003: 278) view that individuals are not ‘communicative robots’ but are socially situated speakers who are capable of negotiating the ‘contingent, motile, and situationally dependent’ (Firth 2009: 163) interaction. However, in spite of the reportedly positive nature of ELF interactions, a note of caution in our enthusiasm is probably warranted. It cannot be ignored that most *lingua franca* studies have been conducted in academic and business contexts predominantly in Western European settings (Firth 2009: 149). Shared educational or professional discourse and similarities in educational level and social background may account for ease of collaboration and supportive attitudes (Koester 2010: 142), as well as heightened attention to reach an agreement.

2.3.2.3 *Lingua Franca* and Interethnic Communication

This section sums up the differences between the two approaches to intercultural communication described above. As mentioned earlier, interethnic studies in Britain undertaken by Gumperz and colleagues can generally be characterised as follows:

motivated by an interest in exposing the workings of unequal power relations and particularly racism; the phenomena investigated usually involve asymmetrical relationships (e.g. employer and job applicant); the participants are fluent speakers of English but differ in variety, i.e. British English, Pakistani English, Indian English; the analytic focus centres on how the differences of communication conventions cause misunderstanding (Roberts et al. 1992; Rampton 2005; 2006). In contrast, English as a *lingua franca* research generally involves participants who are non-native speakers of English in academic or business contexts; and often conducted in a non (native) English-speaking European setting. ELF/LFE researchers are in part motivated by the need to move away from the view of the non-native speaker as somehow deficient when measured against native speaker norms. Instead of merely seeing the language learner as a *non-native* speaker of English, he or she is positioned as a multilingual speaker with a host of interactional skills and pragmatic abilities transferable from one language to another. This view is of course more closely associated with *lingua franca* researchers who prioritise LFE as social action (Canagarajah 2007) rather than as a linguistic system amenable to codification.

The differences between interethnic and *lingua franca* research described above account for the differences in findings – the former illuminates what makes the encounter problematic, while the latter sheds light on what makes the encounter successful. The collaborative and supportive attitude that *lingua franca* scholars find in ELF/LFE contexts may be harder to see in interethnic job interview situations when the power relations are unequal, the situation stressful, and communication goals are different (Roberts et al. 1992; Koester 2010). However, we can find points of intersection between the interethnic and the *lingua franca* perspective. The process is similar: the ‘culturally different’ speaker uses linguistic and paralinguistic signals or

contextualization cues to inform the ‘culturally different’ hearer how they wish their utterance to be interpreted. If the cues are missed or misread, then communication may break down. It will be recalled that in Gumperz’s ‘gravy’ example, the Indian cafeteria server’s falling intonation on the word *gravy* was interpreted as rude by the British customers who were expecting a rising intonation to signal an offer or a question. The misinterpretation is taken from the point of view of a British English speaker norm. But if the cafeteria servers were Mexicans and the customers were Thais, Kenyans or Polish then there would be no dominant group/native speaker norm from which to view the interaction.

The explanatory focus in interethnic communication tends to be the ‘ethnic’ aspect and in *lingua franca*, it is the ‘lingua’ aspect. However, I argue that in intercultural communication, it cannot be all about the ethnic (in terms of previously learnt communication conventions with associated sociocultural knowledge acquired through intensive socialization) and it cannot be all about language without taking into account how culture gets invoked, dismissed or used as a resource in the interaction. I suggest that while the interethnic view tends to limit the theorizing such that differences in communication conventions lead to *problems*, a *lingua franca* outlook presents a way out such that differences lead to *opportunities* for the negotiation of meaning.

2.4. THE RELATIONSHIP IMPERATIVE

In my previous discussion of *lingua franca* interactions, it became evident that one of the key characteristics of such encounters is the participants’ inclination towards social cohesion and consensus-orientation (House 2003). Seidlhofer (2009: 196) goes as far as suggesting that a ‘cooperative imperative’ underlies language use in *lingua franca* contexts. This ‘cooperative imperative’, Seidlhofer claims, ‘urges us to lower our defenses and reduce our differences in the interest of wider communication with other

people' (ibid). It is realised in the speakers' persistence in modifying and adjusting their speech productions to fulfill the goals of the interaction (ibid). This notion of the cooperative imperative has been articulated by other researchers as mutual responsibility for meaning making (Mauranen 2006; Bowe and Martin 2007; Georgieva 2009). In *lingua franca* contexts, it is posited that the cooperative intention seems to be a reflection of the participants' desire to orient towards mutual acceptability and comprehensibility of intended meaning (Mauranen 2006: 125). Based on my data however, I argue that the participants in this study seem to be motivated to cooperate not only to negotiate meaning; they cooperate because they want to establish a socially cohesive group. Indeed, Johnson (1986: 1) claims that people's innate need as humans to form relationships translates into a 'relationship imperative'. What I am attempting to do here is to link what I have observed in my data – participants who prioritise building a team/family – with theoretical insights from other scholars. Given that this study is data-driven, I want to shed light on how language has been used by my research participants to achieve their goal of building and maintaining common ground (Chapters 4 and 5).

2.4.1 Establishing Relations through Language

We use language for a multitude of functions – to give and receive information, to construct and reject identities, to start and end relationships, to express our thoughts and feelings, to teach and to learn, and so on. Halliday (1979: 187) views language as having three general functions - the *ideational* or the content function (what it is about), the *interpersonal* (express attitude, seek to influence others), and the *textual* (the way speakers organise language to convey a message). Brown and Yule (1983: 1) use the terms *transactional* (to give information, facts or content) and *interactional* (to express feelings and attitudes, and social relations) to describe what they consider as the two

general and overlapping functions of language. Gee's (2005: 1) notion of the interactional functions of language suits the purposes of this study: 'to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions'. Indeed Firth (1937: 112) asserts that sharing a common feeling with others is a 'deeply satisfying experience' which indicates that people engage in interactional talk as an end in itself.

How do we know, linguistically, that interlocutors are attending to interpersonal relations? How do we know that what they say corresponds with what they 'do' with words? There is no shortage of frameworks and terminology in the literature that provide a key to unpacking how speakers foreground relationship building and it is doubtful that any one single theory of social relations can explain the complexity of human nature. I outline the ones that illuminate my own understanding of how the participants in the current study instantiate the relationship imperative.

2.4.1.1 Attending to Face Needs: Belonging, Involvement, Non-Imposition

Given that a number of *lingua franca* scholars have identified face management as a contributing factor in successful interactions, it is of value to draw from a theory of social interaction that allows us to see how face may be enhanced, threatened, and restored. I find Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness a useful preliminary descriptive framework to draw from mainly because their model has been argued to have universal application. Their research involved analysis and examples from three unrelated languages: English, Tamil and Tzeltal. Although critics have challenged the universality and cross-cultural applicability of Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of face and face threatening acts, (see Nwoye 1989; Matsumoto 1988; Gu 1990), it is important not to exaggerate the differences. As Sifianou (1992: 43) points out, universal

principles of communication must exist; otherwise it would be impossible to have meaningful contact between people from different ethno-cultural backgrounds.

‘Face’, a concept borrowed from Goffman (1967) is at the heart of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory of politeness. It is defined as ‘the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself’ (1987: 61). It is argued that everybody has face and face wants which can be positive or negative. A *positive face want* is a person’s desire to be well thought of, liked and admired by others, while a *negative face want* refers to a person’s wish to act freely, unimpeded and not to be imposed upon by others. It is claimed that face is always at risk of being lost or threatened, so, it is considered in everyone’s interest to maintain each other’s face. This can be done by avoiding offensive or insulting acts that might be considered face threatening. Face threatening acts are those acts that run contrary to the needs of the addressee to be liked (e.g. disapproval, disagreement and criticism) and to be unimpeded (e.g. commands, requests and suggestions).

Brown and Levinson (1987) state that to protect and maintain face, speakers can use three types of linguistic strategies – negative politeness, positive politeness and off-record. Negative politeness means to use language to convey the message to the addressee that you do not want to impede their freedom to do as they please; positive politeness fulfils the hearer’s positive face needs to be admired, liked and to be included; off-record means to convey a potentially face threatening message to the addressee in an indirect way such as through the use of hints or vague language. My study is not about politeness *per se* but I find two aspects of Brown and Levinson’s framework that are of direct relevance to my study. First, I draw from their notion of face threat which posits that speakers who want to preserve harmonious relations with the addressee will use mitigating strategies to soften the threat to face. For example, a

teacher might use humour when correcting a student's grammatical error to prevent face threat. Trying to repair a misunderstanding can threaten both the face of the hearer and the addressee so it requires redressive strategies to maintain harmony. I will show instances in Chapter 6 of how participants try to repair misunderstanding while at the same time showing face consideration for each other. Second, I draw from Brown and Levinson's conceptualization of positive politeness which is particularly useful in unpacking the data. As they claim, 'positive politeness utterances are used as a kind of metaphorical extension of intimacy, to imply common ground or sharing of wants to a limited extent even between strangers who perceive themselves, for the purposes of the interaction, as somehow similar' (ibid: 103). Positive politeness strategies include claiming common ground, conveying that speaker and hearer are co-operators, and fulfilling the hearer's wants for some X. These strategies are used not just to redress face threats but as a 'social accelerator' (ibid: 103). As I shall discuss in detail in Chapter 4, to claim common ground means to use language in ways which convey that the interactants 'belong to some set of persons who share specific wants, including goals and values' (ibid: 103).

A similar paradigm to Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive and negative politeness is Scollon and Scollon's (2001: 47) concept of involvement and independence. The Scollons claim that all humans need to be involved with others as much as they need independence from them. Involvement can be shown, for instance, by taking the same point of view as the addressee and supporting them in their perspectives in order that a shared worldview is created. Discourse strategies that illustrate that a speaker wishes to be involved with the hearer are noticing and paying attention to their needs, and highlighting in-group membership. While involvement

discourse emphasises solidarity, independence discourse highlights the individual's right to be freed of imposition and to maintain their own autonomy.

The simultaneous human desire for attachment/belonging and detachment/independence is also reflected in Tannen's (2005) work on conversational style: high involvement and high considerateness. According to Tannen, high involvement means showing you are a good person by 'putting on record your connection to others' and high considerateness means showing you are a good person by using non-imposing language (Tannen 2009: 301). Some of the features of high involvement conversational style are: choice of topics (e.g. personal or abrupt topic shifts), pacing (e.g. fast rate of speech and short inter-turn pauses, cooperative overlapping, participatory listenership); narrative strategies (e.g. telling more stories, telling stories in rounds); and expressive paralinguistics (e.g. expressive phonology and marked pitch to show enthusiasm). To show high considerateness a speaker may choose to talk more slowly, maintain longer inter-turn pauses and avoid overlapping speech (Tannen 2005: 40-41; 2009: 302).

2.4.1.2 Comity and the Maintenance of Friendly Relations

Aston's (1988; 1993) language of comity resonates with Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive politeness, Scollon and Scollon's (2001) involvement discourse and Tannen's high involvement (2005). I include Aston here because of the additional perspective he adds to the analysis and discussion in this thesis. He offers a description of how non-native speakers of a language who share little common ground use language to achieve 'comity' (drawn from Leech 1983) which refers to interactional talk aimed at the establishment and maintenance of friendly relations and positive rapport. It is argued that the main concern of comity is the 'convergence of participants' worlds in affective terms - sharing feelings and attitudes rather than knowledge and ideas' (Aston 1993:

226). There is obviously some overlap with Brown and Levinson's notion of positive politeness; however, Aston's conceptualization of comity is not concerned with mitigating face threat in the way this is articulated in Brown and Levinson's model. Although Aston recognises that the participant's politeness strategies contribute to the establishment and maintenance of friendly relations, he argues that Brown and Levinson's politeness theory cannot explain how the use of such strategies enable the participants to 'effectively come to feel comfortable with each other as an outcome' (Aston 1993: 227). Aston, in his criticism of Brown and Levinson's theory, claims that 'it is not necessarily sufficient to convey an intent to redress face in order to effectively redress it' (ibid). While the use of linguistic politeness can be seen as a way to *avoid* unfriendly relations, comity deals with the proactive use of linguistic strategies to *enhance* friendly relations.

Aston (1988; 1993) suggests that enhancing friendly relations in a positive sense involves the negotiation of shared feelings and attitudes, not just of exchanging knowledge and ideas. The use of conversational strategies that display solidarity or support is believed to enhance the sharing of attitudes. Whereas, solidarity is defined as the expression of similar concerns about aspects of reality (weather, recent events) or experience that are common to both speakers, support refers to the demonstration of affiliation towards the addressee's state or experience which has not been experienced by the speaker. In other words, solidarity is 'feeling as' towards a common experience and support is 'feeling for' an unshared experience. As Aston puts it,

one cannot always share another's feelings about such personal matters a[s] triumph and bereavement in the sense of having the same feeling oneself, feeling

as the other, but one may be able to do so in the sense of sympathising, or feeling *for* the other (1993: 232).

According to Aston (1993) solidarity can be demonstrated by finding a common experience and related sentiments attached to a particular experience; agreeing with the addressees or repeating part of their utterance which can show acceptance and approval of the previous utterance; topic shifting (which can be reflective of interlocutors' desire to identify shared concerns); and expressing sympathy. Negotiation of support refers to showing affiliation which may include strategies such as showing appreciation to the other speaker's contribution to the discourse (e.g. laughing at a joke, showing appropriate emotions to anecdotes), giving compliments and apologising. But one does not simply show solidarity or support to a stranger, expression of such requires 'affective grounds that warrant the feelings in question' (Aston 1993: 233). While sharing 'solidary' attitudes requires that all participants have directly experienced features of the situation in question, negotiating support requires a sense of personal involvement and a relationship of 'caring and knowing' between the interactants (ibid: 235).

In Chapter 4, I draw analytic inspiration from Aston to explore how the teachers in my study who do not share some commonalities with their immigrant students used strategies to demonstrate affective grounds for solidarity and support.

2.4.1.3 Relational Practice

Holmes and Marra's (2004) notion of Relational Practice⁷ (RP) serves to broaden our vantage point with which to view how people attend to each other's needs for belonging and autonomy. It is claimed that RP may involve showing friendliness, a

⁷ The authors acknowledge that their concept of RP 'builds on and extends' Fletcher's (1999) work.

supportive attitude, politeness, and consideration for others. It involves recognising people's expertise and skills so that they feel that they are valued members of the team.

It is proposed that doing RP can be explored along two basic dimensions: *creating team* or the construction and maintenance of positive relationships, establishment and enhancement of rapport between members; and *damage control*, which is oriented towards protecting the individual's face and dignity, ensuring the prevention and avoidance of conflict, and promoting consensus amongst colleagues (Holmes and Marra 2004: 381). Some of the discursive strategies involved with creating team are: engaging in small talk and social talk, using humour to entertain and amuse others, giving compliments and expressing approval. In order to control damage, a few of the linguistic devices that may be deployed are mitigating disagreements and refusals, softening directives, and negotiating agreements.

The adoption of RP as another analytical lens is useful for two reasons. First, it serves to pull together the insights from the scholars discussed above in practical, concrete terms as applied in workplace contexts. My participants were attending an employment preparation programme so their workplace identities were sometimes made salient in the interaction. Second, RP's 'damage control' component, which is not well-articulated in the approaches discussed above, provides analytical space to move the theorizing forward. Unlike Brown and Levinson's negative politeness, Scollon and Scollon's independence discourse and Tannen's high-considerateness style, damage control takes us beyond just respecting other people's need to do as they please or be freed from imposition. Unlike Aston's language of comity, RP takes the team or group aspect of the interaction rather than just focusing on dyads. Unlike Holmes and Marra's results, however, RP in my data does not seem to be overlooked or rendered invisible; quite the contrary, creating team and damage control are foregrounded and take centre

stage in the current study – which leads us to the notion of Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). The Communities of Practice model (CofP) gives us a tool to explain how certain practices differ from one community to another.

2.5 THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

I discussed in Section 2.3.1 how shared communication conventions play a role in the success or failure of interactions between individuals. To the extent that they are incompatible, participants will have difficulty understanding each other in spite of the effort and the intent to cooperate. As mentioned earlier, communication conventions are learnt through a long lasting history of socialization and usage; they are unconsciously processed during interaction, thus, not easily subject to repair procedures. However, I argued that there must be strategies that conversation participants activate to deal with differences. For example, we need to be able to account for the type of ‘interpersonal accommodation’ that speakers do as they attune their utterances to what they perceive to be the communicative and interpretive needs of the addressee (Coupland, Coupland, Giles and Henwood 1988: 27).

To bridge the gap between the ‘pessimistic’ view offered by the interethnic approach and the ‘optimistic’ view of *lingua franca* theorizing, I use Communities of Practice or CofP (Wenger 1998) as a heuristic device in this study. By heuristic I mean that I shall use some of the concepts of CofP as a way to talk about my data; I also mean that I do not make any *a priori* assumptions about the group in my study as to whether or not it is a CofP. I suggest that using CofP as a navigational guide allows us to form a bridge between what makes intercultural interaction fail and what makes it work. It enables us to build on the legacy of scholars who have contributed to our understanding of communication by analysing miscommunication; only this time the spotlight will be on how speakers from different communication backgrounds manage to establish

sufficient understanding in spite of their differences. In the same way that individuals learn how to use and interpret contextualization cues through a long history of repeated interactions with close relations, members of the same CofP develop a shared set of linguistic repertoires through repeated engagement and practice. CofP members also develop norms of interaction that are reinforced over time. As shared communication conventions facilitate communication between people who share the same background, it can be argued that shared practices over time can enable members of a particular CofP to create and develop shared communication conventions.

The immigrant group that took part in the current study consists of a highly diverse collection of individuals: Muslims, Christians; Congolese, Haitian, Palestinian, Bangladeshi, Indian, Filipino; landed immigrants, naturalized Canadian citizens; males, females; with professional experience as computer programmer, agricultural expert, social worker, financial director, mutual fund adviser, bank teller, TV technician, part-time produce clerk in a Canadian supermarket; newly arrived to Canada in the four months prior to data collection; those who have adopted Canada as their new country, those who still hope to return to their homelands and those who are navigating the liminal land of being in-between cultures ... the list can go on and on. The point that is emphasised here is that while diversity clearly characterises the participants in this study, they are unified by a common desire to find a job in Canada, by a shared history of emigration and related experiences that go with it (adjusting to the new country, leaving family and friends behind, giving up a job and a lifestyle) and by their use of English as a common language to communicate.

In order to focus on how the research participants use language as social practice, a CofP approach is an appropriate lens to make sense of the data. As House (2003: 573) argues,

the activity-based concept of community of practice [...] fits ELF interactions well because ELF participants have heterogeneous backgrounds and diverse social and linguistic expectations. Rather than being characterized by fixed social categories and stable identities, ELF users are agentively involved in the construction of event-specific, interactional styles and frameworks.

As I explore in Chapter 4, being a team became a very salient aspect of the group that I observed ('family' is another metaphor they used). The importance that the members place on being a cohesive unit resonates with Lave and Wenger's (1991: 98) definition of a CofP: 'a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, *over time* and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice' (my emphasis). The temporal dimension of the relationships within the team will be illustrated by way of examples. Since the field work took place from the first day to the very last day of the group, I was able to observe the development of interpersonal relationships from being strangers to each other to being 'brothers and sisters' (a term used by the lead teacher, included in one of the data examples).

The use of CofP as a heuristic tool facilitates the analytic process; it forces a perspective that focuses on the practices and processes involved in what participants do to claim membership. As Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999: 175) put forward, the CofP provides the analyst with a framework to explore how the process of acquiring group membership interrelates with the practice of acquiring the discourse associated with that membership. In CofP, language is viewed as 'a way of *acting* in the world' (Lave and Wenger 1991, in a Foreword by W. Hanks: 22) which is consistent with the stance that this study takes. Although it is not primarily designed as a linguistic framework of

social learning, the CofP model recognises that language plays an important role in the formation of communities (Wenger 1998: 72).

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) pioneered the use of the CofP as a sociolinguistic framework through language and gender research. Drawing from Lave and Wenger (1991), they define a community of practice as ‘an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations - in short, practices - emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor’ (1992 : 464). It is important to keep this definition in mind because I show in Chapter 5 how shared ways of talking and behaving emerged as a result of mutual engagement over time.

The CofP framework has had its share of criticism. Davies (2005) contends that the concepts of CofP do not address hierarchical and gatekeeping relations; that membership into the CofP is not really a matter of individual choice or desire to be a member but is regulated by hierarchical relations within the community. Additionally, one of the three features of the CofP, that of joint enterprise, has been claimed to be ‘very general’ which limits its utility in social science research (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999: 175). I come back to this point in Section 7.3.4 because this perceived weakness of the CofP model proved to be an advantage in my data analysis. On a different but related note, Corder and Meyerhoff (2007: 441) have criticized the application of the CofP by researchers who deploy the framework ‘as if it were simply a (more fashionable) synonym for the “speech community”, “social network”, or “social/cultural group” ’ (see Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999; Corder and Meyerhoff 2007 for a thorough discussion of how CofP is distinguished from other sociolinguistic frameworks). They maintain that the dimensions of the CofP, as I describe below, need to be distinguished from other frameworks if meaningful interpretations are to be derived using the model.

In spite of the criticisms, I argue that CofP serves the purposes of this thesis because it provides me with an analytic lens which helps explain my data. I do not make any *a priori* claims whether or not the group that I used for the study is a CofP.

2.5.1 Dimensions of Communities of Practice

According to Wenger (1998: 73), a CofP has three important features which give it coherence as a community: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire.

Mutual engagement

Wenger (1998) claims that it is through mutual engagement that relationships amongst individuals are created; when these relationships are sustained, differences in personal attributes or social categories become less important. Indeed, homogeneity is not a pre-requisite to being a community. This concept of mutual engagement is particularly useful in my study as it helps me to explore how the culturally and linguistically diverse participants establish personal relationships.

Joint enterprise

A CofP is also characterised by joint enterprise which gives the community its coherence. Wenger (1998: 77 - 78) describes his notion of a joint enterprise as follows:

- It is the result of a collective process of negotiation that reflects the full complexity of mutual engagement.
- It is defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing it. It is their negotiated response to their situation and thus belongs to them in a profound sense, in spite of all the forces and influences that are beyond their control.

- It is not just a stated goal, but creates among participants relations of mutual accountability that become an integral part of the practice.

Just as the claims processors in Wenger's study (1998) created an environment that would enable them to meet their professional, personal and interpersonal goals, the students and teachers in my study transformed their classroom into a space not just to learn how to apply for jobs in Canada but also a place where they shared stories of successes and frustrations of trying to fit in the Canadian workplace. Chapter 4 shows how the participants in this study started to negotiate their member-defined enterprise. In Chapter 5, I show extracts that indicate that 'relations of mutual accountability' have emerged as a result of a collective and collaborative process of negotiation.

Shared repertoire

A community's repertoire includes 'routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice' (Wenger 1998: 83). It also includes 'the discourse by which members create meaningful statements about the world, as well as the styles by which they express their forms of membership and their identities as members' (ibid). In the classroom I observed for this study, routines such as having meals together, hosting potluck lunches, and walking to the bus station together became an accepted repertoire. The students also created a coffee club which entailed paying \$5 a month to buy coffee supplies (coffee, sugar, cups, and others), taking turns making coffee and washing up. Two of the group members initiated documenting the progress of their time together by way of photographs and video. At the end of the 12 weeks, the students produced a short film, complete with musical score and voice-over, featuring special moments of their time

together. Chapter 5 explores how the participants in my study imbued certain practices with their co-constructed meaning. I give examples that demonstrate how some words and phrases evolved into ‘in-house shorthand’ (Holmes and Marra 2004: 384) or a way of referring to things or events based on previous interactional history.

2.5.2 The Development of Shared Practices Overtime

Having been originally intended as a social learning theory, two presuppositions are implied in the notion of CofP: that the process of learning in social contexts involves the emergence of norms, and that these norms play an important role in the creation of the CofP (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992; Corder and Meyerhoff 2007). It is necessary to look to related literature on group development to explore the interface between practices and the emergence of member-defined ways of doing things. As a participant observer who was able to share a part of my participants’ lives from the first day they met to the last day they were together as a group, I show evidence in Chapter 5 that a by-product of their practices was the emergence of social interaction norms.

Argyle (1994: 169) claims that all groups develop their own norms such as shared ways of thinking and behaving including the development of common beliefs, which harks back to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet’s definition of a CofP. Similarly, Applbaum, Anatol, Hays, Jenson, Porter, and Mandel (1973: 60) claim that:

as group members interact, they tend to standardize their activities to create customary ways of behaving that the whole group can recognise as norms. A group norm is the shared acceptance of a rule prescribing how members perceive, think, feel, and act.

In other words, to be a member entails the negotiation of acceptable and shared ways of belonging. Indeed once shared practices have emerged in the process of mutual endeavor (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992), there may be consequences for transgression and those who deviate from an established practice might experience pressure from the group. As norms emerge from interaction, they serve to regulate the participants' degree of belonging because membership entails adhering to established ways of doing, thinking and feeling (Appelbaum et. al 1973: 61). Along the same lines, Goffman (1997: 110) suggests that part of maintaining order in social interaction lies in the ways societies teach their members to self-regulate by means of rituals. As he claims, 'the general capacity to be bound by moral rules may well belong to the individual, but the particular set of rules which transforms him into a human being derives from requirements established in the ritual organization of social encounters' (ibid: 111).

The organisation of ritual principles is largely facilitated through language. If the members of a CofP are to use language to collaborate, they need to be able to communicate using a shared set of linguistic repertoires including symbols and codes (Appelbaum et al. 1973: 60). In Chapter 5, I analyse data excerpts that show how 'in-group language' emerged out of the participants' interactional history and how they used this language as a regulating device to sustain *in-groupness*. Also in Chapter 5, I explore data excerpts taken in the last weeks of the programme providing evidence that behavioural norms have been established and how violations of such can affect social relationships amongst members.

2.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I argued that interactions between individuals from different cultures are 'culturally shaped, socially negotiated and individually applied' (Berry

2009: 231). I discussed two different approaches in the study of intercultural communication. Although they differ in ideologies, researcher aims and research contexts, I suggested that the combined insights from both make it possible to create a 'metaphorical common ground' that gives the analyst a discursive space for theorizing about intercultural communication. The interethnic approach adds to our understanding of why and how communication across cultures fails by focussing on the problematic aspects of interethnic interactions in specific contexts. However, its emphasis on ethnic differences does not go far enough to shed light on how individuals who bring with them different communicative repertoires actively use strategies to reach understanding. I argue that the reliance on the 'ethnic' of interethnic communication may obscure people's multiple identities and 'intra-ethnic' differences. What is also not accounted for is that people who may have come from different linguistic backgrounds may share the same academic or business discourse or they may belong to the same CofP with a similar linguistic repertoire, thus making ethnic differences less significant in specific contexts. It is at this point where insights from research into English as a *lingua franca* encounters become very useful to explain what interactants do to reach mutual understanding in spite of potential barriers imposed by linguistic limitations and cultural differences. I suggested that it is important not to lose sight of factors that speakers use to manage communication. Examples of these factors, identified by ELF/LFE researchers, are: cooperation; the 'let it pass' principle; mutual sharing of responsibility for meaning making, openness to negotiation; consideration for face and use of face mitigation strategies; benevolence; the suspension of expectations; a supportive attitude; and the shared sense of 'we're in the same boat'.

Drawing from the findings of my study and the 'success factors' of intercultural communication gleaned from English as a *lingua franca* research which are discussed in

Section 2.3.2.2, I reviewed relevant frameworks that facilitate our understanding of how social relations are manifested through language. These frameworks were not applied *a priori* but only after iterative engagement with the audio recordings and transcriptions. I argued that not one single theory can account for the full complexity of social interactions, thus the necessity of combining insights from different scholars. The sometimes conflicting need of humans to belong and at the same time to have the freedom to act as they please is explored in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Scollon and Scollon's (2001) involvement and independence, and Tannen's (2005) high involvement and high considerateness conversation styles. Aston's (1993, 1988) notion of comity underscores the importance of interactional or rapport building strategies in non-native speaker interactions. Holmes and Marra (2004) draw our attention to how work colleagues use strategies such as 'creating team' and 'damage control' to manage social relations in the workplace. While their study shows how Relational Practice (RP) tends to be '*disappeared* or rendered invisible' in specific New Zealand workplace contexts, this study finds that RP is foregrounded and made visible by my research participants. Why RP is made visible or invisible in specific contexts can be explained by the notion of CofP which as I explained is being deployed in this thesis as a heuristic device.

Through the CofP lens we find a way of bridging the seemingly contradictory findings between interethnic and *lingua franca* communication. Indeed, while interethnic communication theorists do not offer much hope in navigating cultural and linguistic crossings, CofP as a social learning theory allows us to hypothesize that culturally and linguistically diverse individuals will, through practice, develop strategies to facilitate interaction.

The claim I want to make and the argument I wish to develop in subsequent chapters is that although the EPPI participants *brought along* culturally diverse ways of communicating, their mutual engagement and shared goal enabled them to *bring about* opportunities, over time, for the creation and negotiation of shared repertoires. I show how they deployed ad hoc communicative strategies and resources to achieve their interactional goals. I explore extracts in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 that show how the participants' foregrounding of interpersonal relationships help them create an interactional context where face-threats are mitigated, damage to face repaired, and social gaffes and violation of social interaction norms are more easily tolerated.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

You need to observe first and then you try to adapt to that culture, this is the first you need to do; it does not matter if you are clever or not, just try to understand.

Velyvet, research participant

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains my methodology, describes my data collection methods and approach to data analysis, and discusses ethical issues arising from the study. It makes available to the readers the reasons why I used certain procedures and processes in the data collection, the decisions taken in the field, and the courses of action chosen to maintain rigour in data analysis.

In this section, I give a brief description of the overarching research interest that was used to generate more specific questions. The rest of the chapter is organised into six main sections. Section 3.2 describes my methodology which draws mainly from ethnography. Section 3.3 gives an overview of the research context. Section 3.4 provides a detailed account of my Scoping study and the Main study. I give background information about my research participants and outline the ethnographic methods used to gather data. Section 3.5 explains the procedures involved in organising, managing and analysing my data as well as the inspirations that guided the analytic process. Section 3.6 explores two specific instances during data collection and data analysis which presented ethical dilemmas for the researcher. In Section 3.7, I conclude by summarising the main points of the chapter.

3.1.1 Overarching Research Interest

As discussed in the previous chapter, the prevailing literature tends to pay disproportionate attention to the problematic nature of intercultural communication. I

have argued that there is a need to present a more complete picture of intercultural encounters which include instances of things going right and not just things going wrong. I was motivated to explore answers to this question:

- How do the research participants who come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds negotiate communication and establish relations, using English as a common language, in an employment preparation programme for Canadian immigrants?

I discuss how I formulated my main research question and sub-questions in Section 3.4.1.1. Consistent with a data-driven enquiry, my questions evolved to reflect the depth of my engagement with the data and to account for the findings of an exploratory study, as discussed in Section 3.4.1.

3.2. AN ETHNOGRAPHICALLY INFORMED APPROACH

Given the overarching interest of this study as discussed above, and my epistemological and ontological standpoint as discussed in Section 1.4, ethnography is the most suitable methodology. Ethnography involves the study of groups in their natural settings which emphasises the importance of obtaining ‘an *insider* perspective so that activities are understood from the standpoint of group members’ (Swann et al. 2004: 101). In order to get an insider perspective, researchers may use data collection techniques that allow them to closely observe the participants or even take part in their social life (Duranti 1997; Swann et al. 2004). I used participant observation and face to face interviews to get as close as ethically possible to my participants so that I could understand the way they make sense of their world. While taking part in an aspect of

their social life, I tried to adopt an ‘ethnographic mentality’ or a ‘particular mode of looking, listening and thinking’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 230). An ethnographic mentality involves: resisting the urge to make hasty conclusions although it might delay the formation of hypotheses; trying to understand people’s perspectives without making *a priori* judgment about the truth or falsity of their statements; paying critical attention to appearances without taking them at face value; and lastly, taking into consideration the particularity of people’s behaviour including aspects of the circumstances that they may or may not make salient (ibid).

Related to the points above is the importance of maintaining just the right amount of tension created by the back and forth movement of being an insider and being an outsider, of being involved and being detached (Hammersley 2006: 11). Indeed, while I made an attempt to see things from the point of view of my participants, I also needed to put my research hat on in order to analyse and make sense of the data. I explain below how I managed the tension between participant and researcher perspectives.

3.2.1. *Linguistic Ethnography*

Situated within ethnography-as-methodology is a growing scholarly discipline in the UK called ‘linguistic ethnography’ (see Rampton, Tusting, Maybin, Barwell, Creese, and Lytra; Rampton 2007b; Tusting and Maybin 2007; Rampton 2010) which combines linguistics with ethnography. Combining the analyst-imposed categories of analysing text provided by linguistics, with self-reflexive insights and sensitivity to context provided by ethnography enabled me to maintain the productive involvement-detachment tension necessary for data collection and interpretation. The ‘formal, structured tools of language description’ (Tusting and Maybin 2007: 579) drawn from interactional sociolinguistics to which I return later, propelled me back from closeness to distance. An inevitable part of the linguistic analysis is of course an interpretation

that may or may not always be consistent with participant perspectives. I do not, however, see this as a weakness but an indication of the richness and complexity of the data.

3.2.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity, defined here as an ‘orientation to research and knowledge making which involves the researchers being critically self-aware of their own role in the research process’ (Swann et al. 2004: 260), is an integral part of my methodology. It is argued that reflexivity is one way of ensuring technical rigour in ethnography which results from the conscious and deliberate linking of the social process of engagement in the field with the technical processes of data collection and the decisions that that linking involves (Ball 1993: 33). The practice of reflexivity is reflected in the writing of this thesis which involves resisting the temptation to give the readers the impression that I am attempting to portray the only version of reality, free from possible contaminations from a researcher’s personal circumstances. Since I was part of the audio recorded data collected, I account for my presence in the analysis. Section 3.6 on Ethics is another instance where I critically reflect on my role in the data collection process.

3.3 THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

I carried out my research in a city in western Canada where I lived and worked for sixteen years. I emigrated there, from the Philippines in 1984 and left in 2000 to move to Switzerland. The decision to conduct my field work in Canada is motivated both by personal and pragmatic reasons. Since I had contacts with Canadian colleagues who worked in the field of immigration and immigrant settlement, I was confident that I could find a suitable research setting. Furthermore, I had very good knowledge of the

city and it was not difficult for me to find a place to stay for the three-month duration of the field work.

Canada is a nation of immigrants (Mulder and Korenic 2005: 5) and has the world's first officially sanctioned multiculturalism policy (Biles, Ibrahim and Tolley 2009: 1). According to the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988)*, the Government of Canada is committed to supporting the full participation of all Canadians in all facets of Canadian society regardless of race, ethnic origin, colour or religion. In what is called the 'Canadian Diversity Model,' the onus is not placed solely on newcomers to adapt to Canada and its norms; Canada is simultaneously expected to adapt to its diverse population (Biles et al. 2009: 2).

The 2001 Census shows that Canada's population was approximately 30 million, with 2.2 million immigrants arriving between 1991 and 2000 - considered the highest for any decade in the past century. Census figures indicate that the foreign-born population came from 200 different ethnic origins and 100 different mother tongues. According to Biles et al. (2009: 1) the rights of Canada's inhabitants to choose their ethnic, linguistic and religious affiliations are protected by Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). The process of exercising these rights is of course more complex in practice as individuals are faced with different social forces when they make decisions about their membership in particular groups.

The majority of the newly arrived were between the working ages of 25 to 64 years, which increased the size of the country's working age population by more than 1.1 million (Biles et al. 2009: 1). Grant (2008: 687) claims that the country's reputation as a developed multicultural nation makes it an attractive destination for many skilled workers from different countries. However, Grant continues, these professionally trained immigrants are often disappointed when they find out they are unable to work in

the country without further education and requalification. It is argued that Canadian employers, unfamiliar with foreign qualifications tend to misunderstand and undervalue those who received their education and training abroad which has resulted in widespread underemployment amongst highly trained immigrants (Grant 2008: 688).

In order to address the employment needs of immigrants, the Government of Canada funds city governments, educational institutions and non-governmental organisations to run language training and employment preparation programmes. Part of preparing immigrants for employment in the Canadian workplace includes helping them develop skills such as writing application letters, making telephone calls to employers, answering interview questions and researching occupations. The Employment Preparation Programme for Immigrants (EPPI) described below, was an attempt by the Government of Canada to help newcomers to the country find suitable employment.

3.3.2 THE EPPI

The Employment Preparation Programme for Immigrants (EPPI), where I collected the data for this study, is an eight-month programme designed for immigrants who have post secondary education or skills training from their country of origin. It has two components: 12 weeks of classroom instruction and 20 weeks of work experience placement, a type of on-the-job training. Classroom instruction consists of job safety skills, interpersonal and intercultural skills, English for Employment, career preparation, computer training, first aid and WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System). The EPPI is run by the College of Western Canada (a pseudonym for the name of the college, hereafter CWC) which is the largest community college and the largest provider of employment preparation programmes in the province. It prides itself on catering to a very diverse student population, 60% of whom were born outside of Canada and originated from 125 different countries. The college is well-known for its

expertise in offering academic upgrading, adult literacy and English language courses. It is located in the centre of the city, close to many amenities and easily accessible by public transport.

3.3.3 ‘Naming’ the EPPI participants

In writing up this thesis, it was difficult to find terms suitable enough to ‘name’ the people who took part in this study – subjects, informants, students, language learners, immigrants, job seekers, or NNS (non-native speakers of English) – all tend to obscure the individual’s role in relation to the researcher as co-constructors of knowledge. These terms also presuppose hierarchical socio-cultural relations. For example, immigrants are expected to adjust to the host culture, job seekers are subject to gatekeeping employers and NNS invites a barrage of theorizing in second language acquisition.

In this thesis I prefer to use the term ‘participant’ because it reflects agency and consent-giving and connotes an act of ‘partaking,’ ‘sharing’ and ‘being a part of’ something. The term ‘participants’ is employed here to refer collectively to EPPI students and teachers who took part in the study. When a distinction is required, I say *student/s* to refer to the *student/s* and *teacher/s* to refer to programme staff who was/were involved with teaching or facilitation. It should be noted that *student* and *teacher* are role categories imposed by the college where data collection was undertaken. In ‘naming’ the speakers in the transcriptions, I initially considered using S1, S2 (S, for student) or T1, T2 (T, for teacher). However, the use of these labels in transcripts implies that the utterances attributed to that speaker are to be interpreted as being dependent on those roles (Hammersley 2010: 558). Using roles or labels to attribute utterances to speakers downplay the multiplicity and fluidity of identities that

may be invoked from one specific role at any given moment. Thus, I use pseudonyms for individual names of teachers and students.

When I asked the EPPI participants to choose their own pseudonyms, I gained insights about their values, interests and identities as they gave me their reasons for selecting a particular pseudonym. One student decided on a name originally chosen for her by her adoptive parents; two chose pseudonyms in honor of their favorite saints; another decided on a nickname that people used to call him in his country of origin. A female participant chose a pseudonym because ‘it sounded nice.’ A male student said I could use his real name but I decided to choose a pseudonym for him to protect his identity. One of the teachers chose a term of endearment used by her spouse only, another chose the name of a favorite actor. I chose the pseudonyms for two of the other teachers.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

The data collection methods I used to explore how participants negotiate communication and establish relations were participant observation and semi-structured interviews, combined with the collection of relevant artifacts such as classroom handouts and textbooks. The study involved two stages: the Scoping Study and the Main Data collection which I discuss below.

3.4.1 Scoping Study

Generally, a Scoping study, similar to Hammersley and Atkinson’s (2007: 29) idea of ‘casing the joint,’ is intended to be exploratory in nature. It may involve visiting (covertly or overtly) possible research sites with the intention of assessing them for feasibility and suitability of carrying out research. In the current investigation, the Scoping study entailed:

- visiting possible research settings to evaluate the feasibility of undertaking research there;
- discussing initial ideas with participants to determine level of interest and practical relevance;
- discussing research parameters with the research contacts including intrusiveness, ethical considerations, and arrangements for feedback;
- observing classes, talking to potential participants; and
- formulating hypotheses based on data collected to guide the main data collection.

I ‘cased’ three possible ‘joints’ located in the same Canadian city for three weeks in March 2009 (see Appendix 1 for request letter to do Scoping study). Two of the sites were community organisations while the third was a local college specializing in academic upgrading programmes for adults including English as a Second Language. All three sites were funded by the Canadian government to deliver language and employment services for immigrants. I observed ten teachers conducting three different types of classes: English language classes; ‘bridging’ classes for immigrants who are licensed to practise their profession in their countries (e.g. engineers, pharmacists, nurses, doctors) but need requalification exams/training to practise in Canada; and job placement programmes for immigrants who have limited exposure to conventional Canadian educational system and lack work related experience. I had the opportunity to informally interview facilitators and students, and to conduct two serendipitous and informal focus groups.

At the end of the Scoping study, I decided that the Employment Programme for Immigrants (EPPI) was the most suitable research site for the following reasons: first, the programme staff of EPPI and the students expressed strong interest in taking part in

the study; second, the EPPI programme's start and end dates coincided with my PhD timeline. I also liked the fact that there was a defined beginning and end of classroom instruction which I thought would give me valuable insights into group dynamics and development. Moreover, one of the programme staff, who proved to be an invaluable resource in negotiating access and 'easing' my way into the role of observer during the main data collection, was a former co-worker and a very good friend.

The data I collected in the Scoping study were in the form of observation notes of classroom interaction, field notes of interviews with students and facilitators and informal focus group discussions. I also kept a research log to record my impressions and reflections throughout the three-week scoping period. At the beginning of the Scoping phase, I had a tentative research plan that outlines a set of questions, data sources and analytical frameworks that I considered (see Appendix 2 for Research Table). As I became more familiar with my data and based on preliminary findings, I reformulated my 'working' guide questions as follows:

3.4.1.1 Guiding Questions

- How do students with varying English language proficiency and different socio-cultural backgrounds successfully negotiate interaction?
- What linguistic or paralinguistic strategies do they deploy to build understanding?
- What communicative resources do they use to 'repair' a possible misunderstanding?

After an iterative process of analysing my preliminary findings and reading related studies on intercultural communication, I generated the following hypotheses as contributors to successful intercultural encounters:

- the use of linguistic politeness (particularly solidarity and involvement strategies such as joking, gossiping), the use of in-group identity markers and in-group language help non-native English speaking students negotiate communication.
- the ‘group’ nature of the interaction (which provides students and facilitators with many opportunities to share common background) helps in the creation of shared context, which in turn facilitates communication.
- the students’ highly diverse backgrounds may have a liberating effect on participants so they are more open to accommodation and negotiation of norms.

One of the advantages that arose out of the Scoping study was that I had the opportunity to start negotiating for research access. When I came back to the field site for the main data collection, I had already built rapport with the programme manager and teaching staff. I had a meeting with them before the start of the observations and they gave me the class schedule and a brief background about each student.

3.4.2 The Main Study

The main objectives of my twelve-week fieldwork from September to November 2009 were to observe (as a non-participant) the EPPI students and teachers in their natural setting, make audio recordings of classroom interactions, interview participants and get relevant documentary evidence. Drawing from the initial findings and hypotheses from the Scoping study and review of related literature, I conducted the main study guided by the following questions:

Main Question: How do the research participants who come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds negotiate communication and establish relations, using English as a common language, in an employment preparation programme for Canadian immigrants?

I added 'establish relations' in my question because attending to relations and the use of relational or interactional language (in the sense of Aston 1988; 1993) seemed to be an important component of successful intercultural interactions. After engaging with my audio data through repeated listening and transcription, reviewing my observation notes and research journal entries and forming insights from relevant literature, I asked the following sub-questions:

Sub-questions:

1. How do the students and teachers of EPPI build and maintain common ground?
2. What discursive strategies and communicative resources do they use to facilitate communication?
3. How do they handle miscommunication/misunderstanding?

It needs emphasising that the use of the phrase 'build and maintain common ground' in sub-question 1, did not precede data analysis. I am deploying 'common ground' in this thesis as an analytic term to capture the data-driven nature of the study. I explain in Chapter 4 how common ground is defined in this thesis. Below I describe the procedures that went into the main data collection phase of the study.

3.4.2.1 Access negotiation

One week before the start of the classes, I met with the programme manager, Ghedi, a Somalian immigrant to Canada. He was very enthusiastic about participating in the study but he left the final say with the individual teachers. Initially, he did not want me to be present in the first two weeks of the class because he had assumed that it would be too uncomfortable for the teachers and the students. He preferred teachers and students to have the opportunity to bond with each other, without the intrusion of an observer. However, Tom, the lead teacher, insisted that it would be less disruptive if I started with the students on the very first day of the class. He invited me to sit in on one

of the screening interviews for programme applicants. In spite of the manager's giving me permission to do research on their site, there was no guarantee that teachers would allow me to observe their classrooms. As there were three other teachers involved, I had to approach them individually to explain my research and get their permission. They all enthusiastically agreed to participate.

3.4.2.2 Getting Informed Consent

On the first day of the class, I gave a brief overview of my research. Then on the last day of the first week, I gave an informal five-minute talk about my project. However previous to that, the lead teacher and I had mutually agreed that it was best to give the students a few days to get to know me and get used to my presence before getting their consent to take part in the study. I handed a two-page information sheet and consent form to the students (see Appendix 3) and talked them through the information, emphasising that they had the option to take the sheet home with them should they wish to read in detail, look up words in the dictionary, or perhaps consult with another person who spoke their language. I emphasised that participation was voluntary and I offered to get the services of a translator if they wanted the consent form translated into their language of choice. None of them said they wished to take the forms home or required translation services. In fact, as soon as I gave them the forms, they signed them after only a cursory glance. They did not ask any questions so I clarified that if at any point they felt that they wanted to withdraw from the study, they could do so. Later, I thought that the students might have been too embarrassed to ask questions about the research or to admit needing a translator as it might have meant loss of face. Furthermore, they might have been uncomfortable about saying no in front of other people. Indeed, it would have been a risk to say 'no' without being seen as uncooperative. In order to compensate for this oversight on my part, I made sure I asked

the students individually during the course of the three months if they were still happy to be part of the study.

3.4.2.3 Field Relations: Having Common Ground with the Researched

I felt very much welcomed by the staff in the research site. I was offered my own desk and chair in an office I shared with two teachers. I was also given my own locker so I could store my notebooks and other research paraphernalia. In the first two days of observation I had lunch in the teacher's room. It was a comfortable environment as I had met most of the teachers during the Scoping study, and had kept in touch with them. I did not want to be identified with so-called 'authority figures' though because it might affect the degree of students' openness with me. As much as possible, I went out for lunch on my own outside of the school premises partly to give space to the teachers and students who might feel that they were being observed all the time; and partly to give myself a break from the intensity of trying to observe everything during class. Halfway through the fieldwork, I found myself spending the lunch hours with the students who took their meals in the classroom. I think this reflected the level of closeness we had established by that time. I did not feel that they considered me an intrusion and they gave me permission to leave the digital recorder switched on while they were eating or having a chat. Apart from the confines of the classroom, I had serendipitous interactions with them when we walked to the bus station or took the same bus together.

My relationship with the teachers was friendly and informal. At the end of each observation, I would have a quick de-brief with them as a group or individually depending on their availability and workload. I felt that my previous experience as an employment and placement counselor in similar programmes helped in gaining their trust.

The common experience I share with the students and teachers enabled me to have what I call a 360° perspective. I used the commonalities we shared as a resource to guide my interpretations and analysis. I do realise, however, that this 360 ° perspective can be misleading and has the potential to obscure the differences and uniqueness of my participants' experiences. It is in being aware of the strengths and limitations of my positionality that I approached my field relations with my participants whose backgrounds are described below.

3.4.2.4 The EPPI participants: Students

There were seven students: four males and three females between 25 to 50 years old. They were from Congo (Phillip), Palestine/Jordan (Elias), Bangladesh (Faisal), Haiti (Velyvet), the Philippines (Jinky) and India (Harleen and Rachana). They were all married with children except for Rachana. Instead of giving a neat and standardized description of the students, I have included excerpts of naturally occurring talk from the students themselves to give an idea of what they find salient when introducing themselves. These excerpts were taken from two different time periods during the programme. The first five excerpts were taken from the presentations that the students gave in the second week of the classroom phase. They were given some guidelines on what they might want to talk about but they decided on what they wanted to share with the other members of the class. Some of the suggested prompts for student presentations were: Personal/Professional Background; Childhood Memories; Happiest/Saddest Experiences; and Things about the Future that one Likes/Dislikes. There are only five extracts below because one participant, Faisal gave his presentation in the first week – which was my ‘immersion’ week (when I did not make any audio recording or write observation notes). The seventh participant, Harleen, did not start until after the second

week because of problems in the registration process. Thus the excerpts from Faisal and Harleen were taken at another point in the programme, a point I come back to later.

In spite of my claim that the extracts below are accounts of my participants, I do realise that as the author of this thesis, I co-constructed these voices just by the mere act of selecting which segments to include here. Since I am not using these extracts for analysis, I apply the formal conventions of written text; false starts, hesitation signals, overlapping backchannels from other students and non-verbal description (e.g. writes his name on the board, goes back to her seat to get a pen) have been excluded. As relationship building is central to the argument I am trying to make, I underline specific sections in each participant's information to give an idea of the intimate quality of their self-disclosure. I use the symbol 'xxx' to refer to undecipherable spoken data.

Rachana

My name is Rachana. I'm basically from India south part of India. My mother tongue is Malayalam and I got two brothers, named _____ and _____. I got married in 2004. My husband's name is _____. Back home he was working in a college as lecturer. I worked there in a banking and mutual fund industry. I was born on 28th of February. I've done my MS in Computer Science, _____ in college in _____ University in India and I've done my MBA in correspondence which belongs to the University of _____. I was born, brought up in hostel in boarding school residence, so it was very sad for me because I was staying with my parents and one day xxx. The happiness was my father was working in Middle East and he used to come from his vacation yearly. Once he bought me chocolates, new dress, so it was a happy childhood. Then the most happiest moment in my life was the graduation, the graduation day and post graduation day and the day I got engaged and my Canadian results came xxx. It was the very happiest

moment, because after long years waiting we got things. What I don't like? The death of my Grandpa. He was one of the dearest to me, and he couldn't witness my marriage, like what xxx celebration in the family. I miss his xxx. Things which I don't like about my future? I got xxx an accident and then in 12th grade so I don't want to remember that day. Then looking at things about my future I want to be professional manager in banking environment like in 5 to ten years I want to be manager. I like to do volunteer jobs with persons with disabilities and diseases. Things that I worry about the future? Getting a good job, good future, a good job for my husband.

Velyvet

My name is Velyvet, I come from Haiti. I was born in a family where there is seven kids and I was the fifth one and now just only me live in Canada. All of them some I think now we are three live in Haiti and the rest of them live in USA. When I took the decision to come here they asked me why here and why I didn't go to the USA. I got married when it was probably two years when I finished my first degree and I got married with a beautiful lady and her name is _____ and she is very nice person and with her we have together three kids and we adopt one also which means I have four kids. We have three daughters and one boy and things that have been important in my life take care of my kids, when I go home xxx that I do. And I play with them and after that when they go to bed I can take again xxx. It's very important to give them their time before I do something else. Things I like about my life? I would say I am a happy person. This is my life. Even my wife it's difficult to know if I have a problem. This is my life and also I like cooking for my family. I like every morning I cook before I come here and I cook for my family and my kids. They like that also they ask me daddy daddy you need to cook for me.

Phillip

My name is Phillip, Phillip Toramba. I was born in Congo. So, I have one sister and two brothers, all in Congo and I am the first. In February this year I lost my father I didn't see him dying. I was in Canada in Congo so that's life is going. I live in the Southside of the city so south maybe there are some neighbours of me so (laughs) I went at school at EPPI class at CWC. In Congo I was working in a TV station as a technician so the position, fixing something, some system so here I'm taking my programme and when I finish my EPPI programme, I hope I hope I hope to get job, job job. And the day, the important day? I say also my wedding. My wedding day is important for me and birthdays of my kids. My two kids the first one my son I choose the day of birth, June 3rd. He was caesarean so I choose that day so, he's born on June 3rd, I'm born on June 3rd (laughs) and also important day is the day we came Canada because all my family came same day. So that day is very important because it was very, very, very violence in Congo. Yeah always war, war war, people raping women, killing people. So it was a very nice day for me to quit the country to come here and to live here. Things that I like about my life, my family first. And things that I do not like about my life are maybe one I can say lack of money, everything revolves around money.

Elias

You know my name I am originally from Palestine my parents kicked out from Palestine in 1948. I was born in Jordan and I could remember I remember that accident happened to me during my childhood. I was hit by like a car, and I suffered xxx but after that I could remember that I worked hard in my childhood. And one of the things that I was xxx I was xxx success and after that my diploma. I was the first and of course xxx after that I come to work. I worked with the UN after that I xxx my bachelor degree and

after that I xxx my master degree and I could remember that even I continue my study with the family and I think I did well because I was the first. xxx, so I had a job I had a family and I xxx mention that really I deal with more than one task. Unfortunately I don't know. All my life I was once successful and I tell you how I came here but the things that sometimes you say it's okay because it is not something that xxx do it but when you xxx something that it is not in your hand. So it's okay but xxx you do whatever that you can do. You do whatever that you should do but sometimes that cannot receive what is expected. Things I don't like? I don't like to be dependent on somebody because this is how I'm created. I remember when I was single I could solve problems of my problems xxx responsibility when my father went away. I could support my brothers and sisters. I could support them with everything. I don't like to depend on somebody.

Jinky

So I'm Marina Jinky Reyes, Jinky for short or whatever you like to call me. So I was born in Manila city Philippines. My parents are, I mean I am the only child but when my parents separated, -my father remarried and they have one daughter as well so xxx family, but my sister is like I'm thirteen years older than her. So she just graduated from college and I went to school. I went to school and finished school in the Philippines and then worked there for more than ten years. Since my parents were separated when I was a child, I was left under the custody of my paternal grandparents, whom I was very close to especially with my grandmother whom I called mama. But when I was seven years old in 1981, my paternal grandmother died and I was, and after she left I was left under the custody of my aunt whom I called mommy. Things that are important to me in my life, one of which is my paternal grandma who's been one of the most important to me that I could and would never forget her. My family right now and my aunt and her

family actually since I was reared and cared for by my grandparents and my aunt, it's more like I'm more of I'm more closer to my aunt and her family than my real father. And things about my life things I like about my life? Although I haven't I haven't had a complete family of my own like with my parents I haven't experienced the real family how it feels to be with them. But I was lucky I have my aunt whom I call mommy and with her I felt the motherly love that I missed and also with my grandparents.

Below are extracts from Faisal's and Harleen's 'career portfolio' presentation which took place in the last week of the class. Both used PowerPoint slides to talk about their career profile.

Faisal

This is a map of Bangladesh. You know Bangladesh is surrounded on three sides by India, on the fourth side is the Indian Ocean. It is in the middle, this is the capital and I live in the capital but my village is near here.

My educational background is Biological Science and I have completed my bachelor degree in Biological Science. And I completed my MSc in Biological Science also from The University of Edinburgh UK. And after completion that Master degree I had just admitted to PhD, and I have got a degree from Bangladesh University. I have my career through many countries in the world. I was in many countries. I was in fifteen countries in the world. I have about twenty-five years work experience in different positions in Bangladesh and in United Nations, xxx. My posting was in Gambia, West Africa and I have to work there to develop the agricultural sector with a second assignment related to food security of that country. And I have the opportunity to work in the Ministry of xxx in Bangladesh. After coming here you know any country initially is difficult to settle and if anybody that don't have any jobs or anything it is more

difficult than any other situation. So we are managing, so we have a house and now we are going to settle here properly this is my goal.

Harleen

Well, you can see that I'm from India and I have done my Bachelor's for computer applications like it's a three year degree. I know English, Punjabi and Hindi very well. These are my first languages I can say. And I'm from North India here. And I had done three years degree of Computer applications and I did my one-year postgraduate diploma in Computer applications, too. And I worked with a bank in India for about one year. I worked there as a customer care representative and then I moved to Canada and I worked with xxx the call centre as a customer service agent and the xxx, a kind of sales company a marketing company. And I like worked as a sales agent xxx. And my job and my job responsibilities as a customer care representative at ____ bank would include like credit card information to my clients because like credit card at that time it was like a new thing in India. We're not used to credit cards back home so it was like a new venture and you have to provide information like what it's all about. And I used to open accounts and deposits and processing credit applications.

As mentioned earlier, Faisal's and Harleen's presentations were given in the eleventh week of the programme or nine weeks later than the presentations given by the five other students. At that time, Faisal's and Harleen's countries of origin were common knowledge and yet they made a point of mentioning where they were from as a salient part of their identity. What I am suggesting here is that in spite of my conscious attempt not to categorize EPPI students in terms of national or ethnic culture, it is a category that is imposed by them. I unpack how this national culture identity has been used by the EPPI students and teachers as a resource in the next chapter.

3.4.2.5 The EPPI participants: Teachers

There were four teachers who participated in the data collection: Tom, Greg, Kate and Marra, with Tom being the lead teacher. Tom spent the most time with the students at 17 hours a week, five days a week of teaching time excluding one to one sessions. He was in charge of all employment related subjects. He also liaised with employers and arranged work experience placements for students. Greg taught 'Interpersonal and Cultural Skills' three times a week, at four and a half hours a week. Kate taught one-hour computer classes three times a week. Marra was responsible for coordinating with employers regarding work experience placements. She came to class about two times a week to team-teach with Tom. She became progressively more involved with the students in the last few weeks of the programme, mostly on a one to one basis. She practised making telephone calls and interview techniques with them and even drove them to interview appointments. Apart from Marra, who was an immigrant from Colombia, all the teachers were born and raised in Canada. They all had at least five years of teaching experience in their subject areas.

3.4.2.6 Methods of Data Collection

Participant Observation with Audio Recording

I considered the possibility of using a video recorder, in addition to the audio recorder, to collect data. However, I decided against video recording after the Scoping study for pragmatic reasons. For one, I would have had to put the video camera at the front of the room which would have been distracting to the students. A video system would have been more complicated to set up as the students used at least two different rooms – the regular classroom and the computer lab – on a normal day. But more importantly, I opted for audio recording because the audio recorder was less intrusive

for the EPPI participants. It was easy for me to show them how to turn it on and off and to carry it around if they felt like it when they went into their break out rooms. It would have been difficult to do this with the video equipment. I do realise that important nonverbal information such as facial expressions, gestures or gaze patterns will have been missed thus constraining the interpretation. Although my presence in the room and corresponding observation notes provided me with complementary contextual information, they cannot compensate for the level of detail that video recording can offer. But since I was not attempting a multimodal type of analysis, audio recording was the most suitable method to collect data.

It has been claimed that participant observation means ‘being with others and observing them’ (Duranti 1997: 89). I would add that, in practice, it entailed being with others and observing them, and observing myself observing them, and observing them observing me. I had initially intended to carry out a *non*-participant observation method, however, I found myself constantly navigating between participant and *non*-participant roles. One of the teachers in the study, said that he did not feel like being ‘observed like a lab rat’ so he encouraged me to participate. He sometimes treated me as a resource person or assistant teacher; at other times he treated me as a student by getting me to take part in small group activities. Different identities were ascribed to me during field observation. Sometimes, students would solicit my advice or feedback when they had mock interviews, thus putting me in the position of an ‘expert.’ Indeed, as Emerson (1983: 179) points out, the researched may try to ‘incorporate the fieldworker into their social worlds and routine rounds of activities’. Below is a photo of the researcher ‘in the middle of things’ (Duranti 1997: 89) which provided an ideal vantage point to observe the interactions. It was taken by one of the students, during a cooking class. I included it here to illustrate how unsustainable it was to maintain a *non*-participant observer stance.



Figure 1 Researcher as 'Participant 'Observer

In the photo above, I was assigned to work with two students in preparing the salad and the salad dressing. I felt that declining to participate in the meal preparation to concentrate on observation might have been more intrusive and might have made the participants uncomfortable. Having been incorporated into my participants' social activities enabled me to momentarily 'go native' without surrendering my researcher role.

The classes ran for a total of twelve weeks, five days a week, 5-and-a half hours a day excluding an hour's break for lunch. Shown below is the typical schedule of classes.

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:00 - 11:00	English for Employment (Tom)	English for Employment (Tom)	English for Employment (Tom)	English for Employment (Tom)	English for Employment (Tom)
11:00-12:00	Job Safety Skills (Tom)	Job Safety Skills/ Computers (Tom)	Job Safety Skills (Tom)	Job Safety Skills/ Computers (Tom)	Employment Preparation (Tom)
12:00-1:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1:00-2:00	Computer Literacy (Kate)	Employment Preparation (Tom, Marra)	Computer Literacy (Kate)	Job Safety Skills (Tom)	Computer Literacy (Kate)
2:00-3:30	Interpersonal & Cultural Skills (Greg)	Employment Preparation (Tom, Marra)	Interpersonal & Cultural Skills (Greg)	Scheduled individual appointments	Interpersonal & Cultural Skills (Greg)

Figure 2 Class Schedule

The table reflects the employment focus of the EPPI programme which was to prepare students for participation in the Canadian labour market. What stood out for me was the ‘Interpersonal and Cultural Skills’ taught by Greg three afternoons a week. The thrust of his lessons was to help the students develop self-confidence and assertiveness skills at home and in the workplace. Topics such as raising children, handling conflicts, expressing feelings and giving negative feedback, and dealing with racism were discussed. Tom’s ‘English for Employment’ and ‘Employment Preparation’ (with Marra) included discussions on building effective relationships with co-workers, establishing rapport on the phone when contacting employers, and making small talk in the workplace. Behind the programme’s employment preparation focus seemed to be a belief that interpersonal skills should go hand in hand with the job skills. As Tom said to the students in one of the discussions, ‘it’s important that you establish those relationships. I’ve had people in my class who are very bright people and who are technically savvy, but they forgot the importance of alliances.’

The seating arrangement, shown below, was not conducive to a passive observer role because there was no ‘blind spot’ (Duranti 1997: 101). There was no ‘back’ of the room as the students’ chairs were lined up against the wall. Sitting in a corner was an option but that would have defeated my intention to be inconspicuous. It would have created an imposing impression of an observer monitoring the observed. I regularly switched seats occupying the chair on either end of the U-shaped arrangement to get a change of perspective. It was the least intrusive location – not within the direct eye contact of students and teachers and yet I could observe most of the action from where I was seated. The diagram shows the typical seating arrangement in the first eight weeks of the programme.

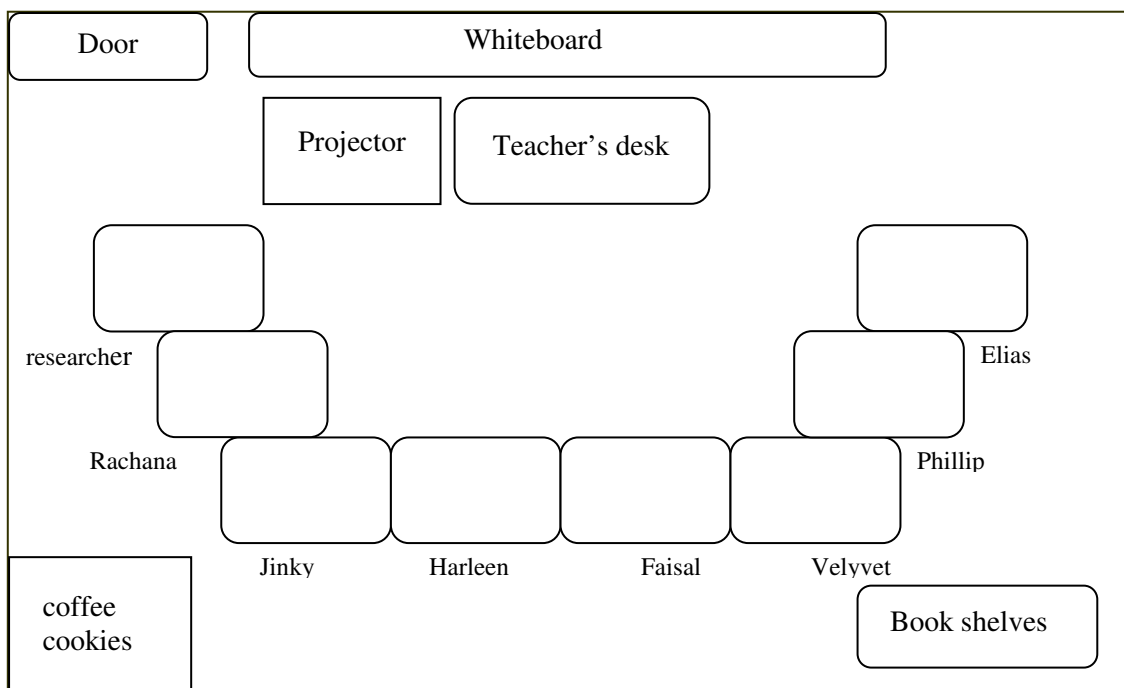


Figure 3 Seating Arrangement, Weeks 1-8

In the ninth week of the programme, the lead teacher asked the students to help him move the chairs and pods (sectional desks) to form one rectangular table (shown below), board room style. He said that the U-shaped seating arrangement was too ‘cavernous’, and that he would like it to be ‘warmer, more personal and intimate.’ One

of the students, Elias agreed and remarked that the arrangement below ‘reflected the spirit of the team.’

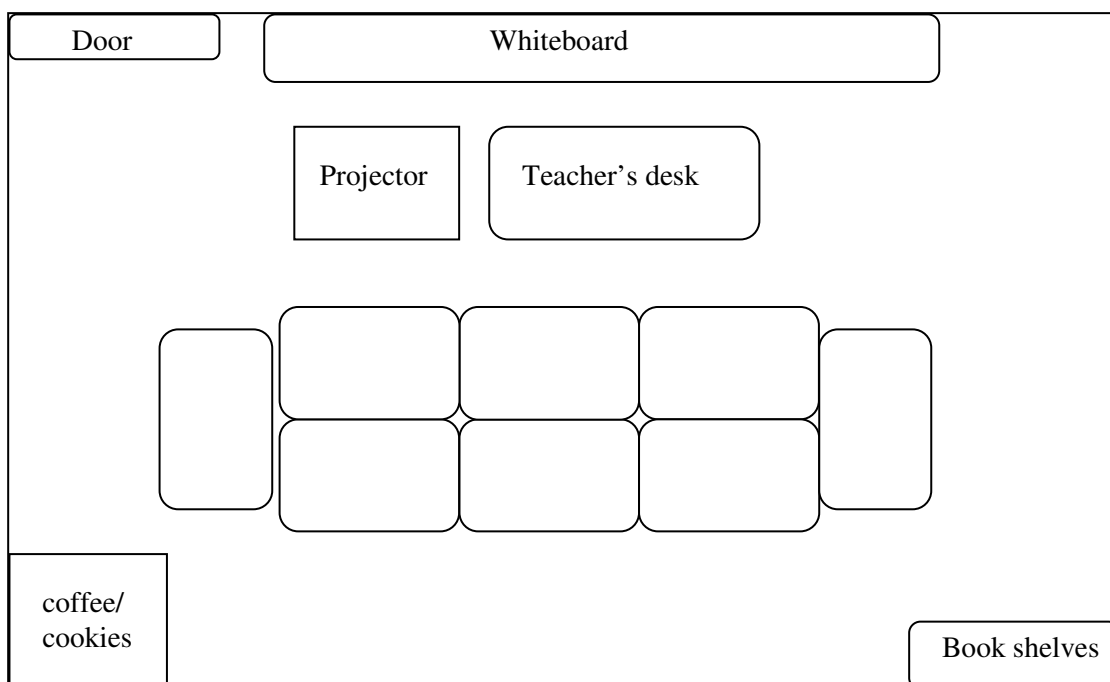


Figure 4 Seating Arrangement, Weeks 9-12

In the board room style arrangement above, the students tended to be more flexible in the sense that they did not sit in the same chair every day. In terms of observation, it was more difficult for me to maintain a marginal position. It was more challenging to direct my gaze downwards to avoid eye contact without being seen as disengaged. My usual posture in the U-shaped arrangement (with my head down constantly writing observation notes) became harder to maintain especially when everyone else was actively interacting.

Audio recording Spoken Interaction

In the U-Shaped seating arrangement, I used two digital recorders (no bigger than the size of a mobile phone), one placed on the teacher’s desk and the other one close to me so I could make a note of the ‘digital time’ on my notes. When the seats were rearranged board room style, I found that using one recorder in the middle of the

table was sufficient, although I kept using the other one as back-up. When the students worked in groups (usually two groups of four and three), I made sure I asked students' permission to record their discussions. I handed the recorder to them and told them that they should feel free to turn it off or move it away from them if they felt uncomfortable in any way. In some instances, the small group discussions were carried out in different parts of the school building so I divided my time observing each group.

The audio recorded data has limitations. Firstly, although the recording equipment produced high quality recordings, it obviously did not have the capability to isolate parallel conversations. When the students worked in groups, in the same room, it was very difficult to understand sections of the recording, oftentimes made more challenging by frequent overlapping speech. Secondly, some participants spoke louder and more often than the others. Two of the female participants, Rachana and Harleen, spoke very softly so it was difficult to make out some of the words they were saying even after repeated playbacks. The point here is that even the most sophisticated audio recorder will tend to distort the interaction. Trying to capture everything that was said in the interaction, even with supporting observation notes and supplementary interview data, seemed a hopeless undertaking. However, as Tannen (2005: 47) maintains, 'on the basis of the recording, we can retrieve much of the material that was a crucial part of the interaction.' Thirdly, the process of transcribing the audio recorded data also inevitably alters the data. Yet transcription is a necessary step in order that the data can be analysed. Thus, in spite of their shortcomings, audio recording and transcription enable us to freeze certain moments in the interaction and draw insights out of them.

Semi-structured interviews

The audio recordings of naturally occurring classroom interactions are the centre piece of analysis in this thesis and the interviews with students and teachers were used to supplement the analysis. The recorded interviews, which were conducted in September, October and November, were semi-structured in that I had some ideas of the questions I wanted to ask (Appendix 4.1 for teachers and 4.2 for students) but the discussion was otherwise relatively open. The student interviews also provided an opportunity for students to comment freely on specific moments. For example, in Section 6.3 where I analysed an extract taken from the Interpersonal and Cultural Skills class, it was through student interviews that I had a better understanding of a miscommunication episode in class.

When I presented my research to the students in the first week of the class, I asked for ‘interview’ volunteers. Initially, four students volunteered (and I interviewed them in September and October) but in the last week of the class all seven students volunteered. I gave them control of when and where they preferred to be interviewed. I also gave them the option of having a phone interview and I offered to interview them at their place of residence if that was more convenient. In line with Fontana and Frey’s (2005) view of method-as-morality, I decided to foreground the needs and convenience of the EPPI participants over my methodological concerns. One of the consequences was the ‘messiness’ of the process. The students preferred to be interviewed at coffee breaks or lunch breaks, or before the start of classes. This meant five to ten minute mini-interviews before class or during coffee; at lunch, it meant having lack of privacy (as all the other students ate in the same room) and having to deal with parallel conversations. Although I had not envisioned conducting group interviews, that was how the interview process evolved especially for interviews conducted at lunch. To

illustrate, I might have started talking to just one interviewee but other students in the room would freely offer their viewpoints and then the process would evolve into a group chat.

The student interviews during the last week of the classroom phase evolved into an ‘I have time, let’s do it now’ arrangement. The students were busy making arrangements for their five-month work placement which was obviously the priority, so, whenever they were ready, we would then just sit in one corner of the room and have a quick chat, within hearing distance of the other students.

The teacher interviews were more difficult to arrange. Tom and Marra preferred to be interviewed together. We conducted the first interview at a coffee shop they chose which was outside of the school premises; the second time was in a restaurant which proved to be very noisy so I did not use the recorder but took notes in-between bites; the third one in November was conducted after the last day of the class. Again, just like in the student interviews, I had my guide questions but I encouraged the teachers to discuss freely their impressions, feelings or concerns about the programme/students. I tried to arrange an interview with Kate, the computer instructor, but she was very busy so the interview did not take place. One of the teachers, Greg, did not have time during the data collection period. I was able to interview him on the telephone one month after I had left the research site (and the country).

In addition to these pre-arranged interviews, I was able to use ad hoc/as-and-when ‘chats’ to inform my interpretation and analysis of specific events. For instance, following Kate’s attempt at a joke ‘Why are frogs so happy?’ (Section 6.4.1) I asked Jinky and Velyvet after the class what they thought of the riddle. I needed to ask this right after the event rather than waiting for a pre-arranged interview when they might have forgotten the interaction.

As indicated above, because the focus of this thesis is on classroom and lunch hour interactions, the segments of the interviews that I used were supplementary to the analysis of the interactions and informed this analysis. For example, in Section 4.6, I concluded that two of the participants (Elias and Phillip) managed to resolve their conflict in spite of linguistic limitations in English. I was able to build into the analysis that English was not normally used by both students at home or with close friends - information that I got from the interviews.

Field Observation Procedure

I did not do any audio recordings or note-taking in the first week of the class to immerse myself in the research ecology. It gave me the opportunity to get to know the participants and to get them used to my presence. I started audio recording the lessons and taking observation notes in the second week. The observation schedule in the first six weeks is shown below:

Weeks	Observation Schedule
Week one: In Class	Immersion Week, Participant observation, without audio recording, without taking observation notes
Week two: In Class	Participant observation, with audio recording and observation notes
Week three: Out	Data management (review notes, listen to audio, transcribe)
Week four: In Class	Participant observation, with audio recording and observation notes
Week five: In Class	Participant observation, with audio recording and observation notes
Week six : Out	Data management (review notes, listen to audio, transcribe)

Figure 5 Observation Schedule, Weeks 1-6

As shown above, in the first half of data collection, I spent a total of four weeks in the class. I felt that it was necessary to spend time outside of the class to reflect on my observation notes, listen to data excerpts that I found remarkable during the observation, and transcribe. The breaks from observation gave me analytic space to deepen my understanding of the observed. Indeed, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 37) claim, researchers should use a selective approach in their data collection which as they argue, ‘will normally result in data of better quality, provided the periods of observation are complemented by periods of productive recording and reflection’ (ibid).

During the two weeks that I was not in class (Weeks 3 and 6), the teachers made note of my absence. One said, ‘oh my goodness, what am I going to do without you,’ half-jokingly of course. The students also made salient my absence and said that they missed me. I felt that the process of engagement and re-engagement might be disruptive. So, after consulting with the teachers, it was agreed that my observation schedule should be modified: for the last six weeks of the data collection, I was in class every week, three days a week. It worked better because I was able to follow the goings-on in the group more closely. From week 7 to week 12, I followed the observation schedule below:

Days	Observation Schedule
Monday: In Class	Participant observation, with audio recording and observation notes
Tuesday, Out	Data management (review notes, listen to audio)
Wednesday, In Class	Participant observation, with audio recording and observation notes
Thursday, Out	Data management (review notes, listen to audio)
Friday, In Class	Participant observation, with audio recording and observation notes

Figure 6 Observation Schedule, Weeks 7-12

3.5 PROCESSING AND ANALYSING THE DATA

By the time I finished my data collection and left the research site, my data included:

- Audio recordings of classroom interaction: 150 hours
- Interviews: eight hours audio recording, plus two hours of field notes because I was unable to record in the noisy environment
- Copies of classroom materials, handouts, and textbooks (four textbooks/workbooks: *Feedback Skills for Leaders*, *Developing Positive Assertiveness*, *Career Planner* and *Working and Living in the Province*, one 255-page vademecum on Business English, 20 various handouts accumulated over 12 weeks
- My observation notes (seven notebooks, see Appendix 5 for excerpts)
- My research journal where I made daily entries after each day of observation (67 pages of electronic notes, see Appendix 6 for an excerpt)
- Copies of photographs taken by the students over the twelve weeks
- A copy of the video recording produced by the students

The last two, class photos and videos, were initiated by the students because they wanted to create a memento of their time together. I did not include any photographs or still-images of the video recording in this thesis that might compromise the identity of the participants. I reviewed and considered all the data but because of the sheer volume of the audio data and the time-consuming nature of the transcription process, it was necessary to be selective. I discuss my criteria for transcription in Section 3.5.2. The analytic ideas that I have chosen to highlight in this thesis were drawn from what the EPPI participants made salient through talk during the course of the fieldwork. I come back to this point later.

The 'daily' analysis started to take shape at the end of each field observation. I re-read my field notes, logged my impressions on to my electronic research journal, uploaded the audio recordings onto my transcription software (*Express Scribe*) and listened to the audio recorded data. *Express Scribe* enabled me to increase the 'play' speed of the audio data and still understand the talk. I could also fast forward the sections where there were periods of silence (e.g. when students were writing or reading quietly, or working on computers on their own). I did this for pragmatic reasons; otherwise, the five to six hours of data every day would require the same amount of listening time. I listened to the day's audio data on the same day of the recording. Instead of the usual ethnographic practice of 'memoing' when doing analysis, I did 'bookmarking.' With *Express Scribe* I could bookmark sections that seemed interesting and relevant:

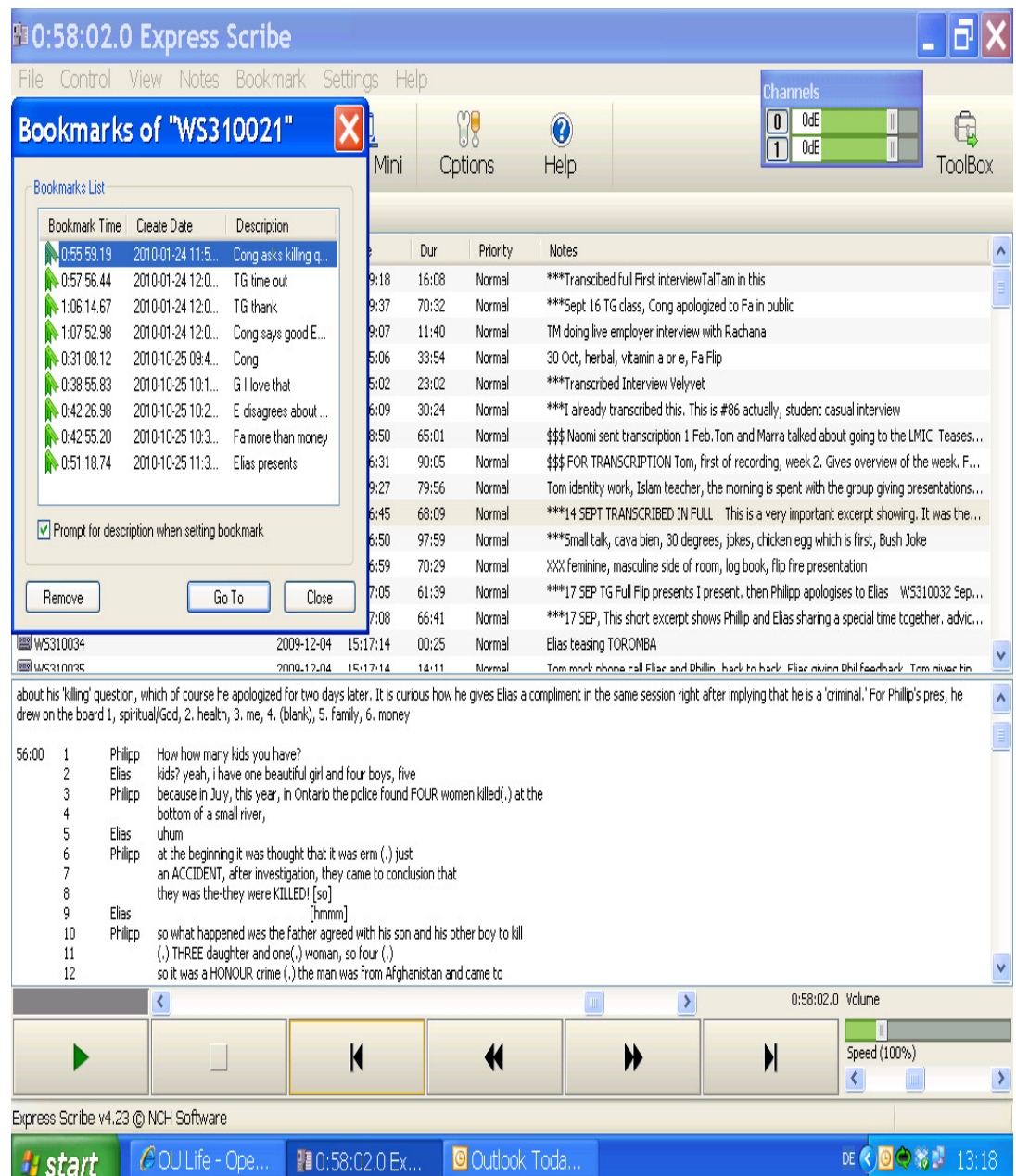


Figure 7: Screen Shot Transcription System

The benefit of being able to bookmark the audio data instead of first having to transcribe and then doing preliminary analysis is that it allowed me to skip the mediating effect of the written transcript. I could easily go back to the sections that I found noteworthy for analysis, decrease the ‘play’ speed for hard-to-understand sections and then make notes right on the *Express Scribe* page. I realise that selective bookmarking of ‘interesting’ or ‘relevant’ bits carry the risk of overlooking important

data segments since what would be deemed ‘interesting’ or ‘relevant’ will change over time. As a way to ‘triangulate’ my bookmarks, I uploaded all audio data onto a portable MP3 player with headsets so that I could listen to the recordings while I was on a public transport, waiting in airports, having a walk or even while doing housework. This practice provided me with serendipitous insights. Listening to the data while engaged in another unrelated research activity allowed me to have a ‘distant-near’ perspective (Duranti 1997: 87). I always carried around a notebook so I could write down audio file numbers and the digital time display. I then went back to *Express Scribe*, searched for the digital time display noted on my MP3 player and listened to the sections I noted in my notebook.

The decisions taken (use of a particular transcription software, bookmarking, and iterative listening-as-secondary activity) was a way to ‘process’ the huge volume of audio data. When I drew up my observation schedule before fieldwork, I already knew that I would have more than one hundred hours of audio data at the end. I knew that it would be an unrealistic and impossible undertaking to transcribe the data in full within the timelines of this PhD. As Kvale argues, having hundreds of pages of transcriptions can be ‘too extensive to overview and to work out the depth of the meaning of what was said,’ which can ‘lead to a superficial product, unfinished due to external time constraints’ (Kvale 1996: 277). Strategic transcription decisions had therefore to be made so that the research journey did not become the ‘road to hell paved with transcripts’ (Kvale 1996: 280). The decision to transcribe 30 hours out of the 150 hours of audio recordings was made after I determined what was most salient from the participants’ perspective. I explain in detail what I mean by salient in Section 3.5.2.3.

3.5.1 Transcription

The process of transcribing the selected 30 hours was a crucial part of the analytical process. It was an important stage that gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in the data which involved a ‘slowing down and reflexive re-routing of a process that operates much more rapidly in ordinary social interaction’ (Hammersley 2010: 564). Transcription involves making choices such as what and how much to transcribe as well as transcription conventions used – all of which are influenced by researcher circumstances such as goals and interests, disciplinary affiliations, theories and ideologies (Ochs 1979; Swann 2007; 2010). There may be a danger of bias in that researchers may choose to transcribe stretches of talk that support their arguments while ignoring counter-evidence (Swann 1994). A certain degree of reflexivity is thus required so that any decision taken is made only after careful consideration of what a particular choice entails (Bucholtz 2000).

The level of transcription detail (see Appendix 7 for transcription conventions) I used is based on what I have understood to be ‘good enough for the purpose at hand’ (Cameron 2001: 39) and that would enable me to answer my research questions. I did not adopt the level of detail often used in Conversation Analysis (see Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974) where there is a focus on conversation management (e.g. the management of turn-taking). However, I produced a relatively fine-grained transcription, indicating features such as pauses, overlapping speech and emphasis that informed my interpretation of utterances.

The 30 hours of transcribed data in this thesis comprise audio-recorded classroom interactions (students and teachers), lunchtime conversations (students only) and informal chats with students, which gave me sufficient material to explore how the EPPI participants establish relations and handle miscommunication.

3.5.2 Criteria for Decisions Taken on Selecting What to Transcribe

Decisions on what to transcribe were inevitably driven by the overarching goal of the study, which was to understand how the EPPI participants negotiate communication using English as a common language. Bearing this main aim in mind, I used four criteria to choose sections of the data for transcription: temporal dimension, initial findings from the Scoping study, what the EPPI participants made salient in the interaction, and lastly the search for ‘counter-evidence.’ I outline the rationale for these selection decisions below:

3.5.2.1 Temporal Dimension

The group’s existence had a temporal component in that there was a specific beginning and end date. And indeed, through iterative engagement with the data, I noticed that over time, the EPPI participants developed a type of in-house shorthand or words that were associated with previous interactions. As an attempt to capture some of the dynamics of the relationship development as enacted through talk, I made a decision to transcribe about ten hours of data in September (beginning of the group), in October (middle) and in November (end of the classroom phase). Not only was this useful for contextualizing utterances but it also gave me a glimpse of how, through practice, a cohesive group started to evolve as members negotiated norms and linguistic repertoire.

3.5.2.2 Initial Findings from Scoping study

I have already mentioned that the findings in the Scoping study, Section 3.4.1, indicated that factors like the use of linguistic politeness, identity markers and in-group language seemed to help the students negotiate communication. Based on the limited data, I hypothesized that being in a group helped students and teachers create shared

context or a kind of common ground. I used these preliminary findings to look for instances in the data where members were attending to relations and group building.

3.5.2.3 What Seemed Salient for the EPPI participants

I spent the first two ‘familiarisation’ weeks immersing myself in the activities of my participants in order to get a sense of what they considered important. I bracketed out my intuitive impressions and listened for other evidence in the data that supported or negated my ideas of what sections to transcribe. I then started making preliminary transcriptions and read related literature to make sense of the data, and then I looked for more instances of the emerging theme. For example, it seemed to me that ‘team’ and ‘family’ were important themes for the group. The first occurrence or ‘moment’ (Lillis 2008) took place in the second week of the programme when one of the students asked Tom, the teacher, about a cooking class. Tom’s response was:

⁸83 Tom it is a way for us to GEL together so that we are the EPPI TEAM,
84 our identity erm (.) will now transcend erm the erm the EPPI
85 the erm EPPI we'll be the the
86 EPPI team so that's REALLY why we cook so we become this
87 wonderful (.) (claps his hands once) team

There were other ‘moments’ during the twelve weeks that showed evidence that relationship-building was important to the class. One of the most significant analytic moments for me was when Tom, in week 11 of the classroom phase, said:

22 Tom you are now an extended FAMILY (.) to each other
23 so you have erm brothers and sisters erm
24 that you you develop strong bonds,

⁸ The line numbers are for ease of reference when analysing specific utterances. They reflect the number in the transcription template that I used to transcribe the audio data.

25 DON'T LET THOSE BONDS break. Try to hang on to those bonds,
26 because you'll need each other over the next few months

And then on the very last day of class, one of the students, Jinky, said with tears
in her eyes:

1 Jink we're all going separate ways but
2 I hope that we'll continue with our communication
3 and our friendship and erm the the feeling that we have been
4 a family together and I hope that would be with us forever

In Chapters 4 and Chapter 5, I focus on how the family and team metaphor became part of the shared repertoire of this group as they negotiated a joint enterprise, driven by mutual engagement to form a cohesive community. The corpus shows many instances that demonstrate the importance that the EPPI participants placed on building a joint enterprise, defined by a membership that values social cohesion.

3.5.2.4 Counter-evidence

Chapters 4 and 5 give us a picture of the EPPI participants attending to building and maintaining cohesive team relations. I reviewed the whole data set to seek for instances that show possible threats to the establishment of a cohesive team. Chapter 6 contains examples of what I considered as counter-evidence with a focus on problematic talk, more specifically miscommunicative sequences, which can be a threat to social cohesion.

3.5.3 Analytic Inspirations

The analytic process required a continuous process of back and forth movement between findings from the Scoping study, audio data, observation notes, theoretical literature, and related studies. For analytic scaffolding, I draw upon interactional

sociolinguistics which is the study of language in use in specific contexts (see Gumperz 1982; Gumperz 2001b; Holmes 2008). Interactional sociolinguistics is concerned with the discursive strategies that individuals deploy in order that their co-participants in a specific context can understand what they are attempting to communicate in the way they intend to be understood. In Gumperz's (2001b) words, interactional sociolinguistics refers to 'an approach to discourse analysis that has its origin in the search for replicable methods of qualitative analysis that account for our ability to interpret what participants intend to convey in everyday communicative practice' (ibid:215). According to Rampton (2007a: 4-5) the resources that are used in analyses informed by interactional sociolinguistics are:

- *linguistics and discourse analysis* which enables analysts to explore the type of linguistic resources that interlocutors invoke;
- *Goffman and conversation analysis* which provide mechanisms for investigating and making sense of situated encounters;
- *ethnography* which allows the analyst to look beyond the specific encounter and locate it within longer and broader socio-cultural contexts loaded with histories, as well as the personal experiences and viewpoints that participants have brought along to the interaction;
- *other public and academic discourses* which make clear the goal and relevance for the analysis in terms of the wider environment where the research is located.

I drew heavily on the first three for a data-driven, contextualized fine-grained analysis using the Communities of Practice concept as a heuristic device. Interactional sociolinguistics as an analytic tool serves the purposes of this study as it enables researchers to explore how participants, using language, negotiate and maintain relationships (Vine, Holmes, Marra, Pfeifer, and Jackson 2008).

3.5.4 Accounting for Validity of Interpretation

In this section, I attempt to answer these questions: how do I convince my readers that what I am reporting in this thesis is what really went on? how do I convince them that my interpretation is sufficiently plausible? First of all, there is no one definitive interpretation, but a multiplicity of interpretations (Swann 1994; Tannen 2005). I would argue that my interpretations are based on what is ‘demonstrable’ in the data (Tannen 2005: 49). As Wood and Kroger (2000:170) argue, ‘demonstration reflects the core of analytic work’ and is a central requirement for establishing validity. Although I acknowledge the multiplicity of interpretations, they are not equally plausible; one is not as ‘good’ as the other.

In order to safeguard the validity of my interpretation, I present evidence in the data that show what members make salient. As discussed above, the data transcribed and then later analysed were based on what students and teachers told each other during class or lunchtime conversations. In the excerpts shown above with Tom and Jinky, they said that being a team/family were important to them. But people’s words and behaviour may not necessarily be congruent, so I also present evidence in how they *do* what they *say*. As Wood and Kroger (2000:171) argue, ‘the incorporation by a participant of (lexical) content relevant to a particular category, relationship, and so on (e.g., age, parenthood) supports the interpretation of that category as one that is relevant to the participant.’ Furthermore, there is evidence in the data, sustained from the start of the existence of the group to the last day that my interpretation is not based on random occurrences but on patterns that penetrate and underlie the interactions.

Consonant with Tannen’s (2005) approach, I have used participant behaviour to ground my interpretation. For example, when I make a claim that student A demonstrates concern with how he has hurt student B’s feelings, I present evidence in

the data, for example, showing student A apologising to student B for hurting their feelings. It is however very difficult for the analyst to make a definitive interpretation as to the sincerity of A's apology. When I claim that there is a difference in joking schema between teacher and students, I show how interlocutors make clarification attempts or 'do' confusion signalled by a lengthy pause, for example. Wood and Kroger (2000) convincingly argue: 'the recognition or treatment by a participant of a particular utterance in particular way (e.g. as an insult or a tease) supports the giving of that particular meaning or the treatment of the utterance that way by the analyst' (ibid: 171).

In Chapter 6, where I analyse miscommunication sequences, I show evidence in the data that interlocutors also view these sequences as miscommunicative. If speakers treat their previous utterance as problematic, (by performing repair to fix the problematic utterance) then the analyst has justification for viewing the utterance in question as creating a problem (Wood and Kroger 2000: 171).

I stayed as close as possible to participant-perspective interpretation but I did not abandon my role as analyst. A constant navigation between participant and researcher perspectives enabled me to capture the complexities and the contradictions. For example, the corpus contains instances when students were emphasising differences attributed to ethnic and national culture. At other times, they invoked similarities as if saying 'we are all human and have the same core in spite of differences in background.' Putting my researcher hat on provided me with a view in order to make an interpretation, for instance, that the EPPI participants have used ethnicity as a linguistic resource.

I considered using elicitation procedures (Gumperz 1982) as another dimension of enhancing the validity of my interpretations. This would have required getting the EPPI participants to listen to extracts of audio data and then asking them for their

interpretations. I had to abandon this idea because of time constraints on the part of the participants. The students started their work placements after the last day of the class and it would have been unreasonable and inconsiderate to require them to do more work. The teachers also moved on. When the classroom phase was finished, they had to prepare for another group of students while coordinating with employers to ensure that the placements were suitable. The second option was sending the EPPI participants, via email, the transcriptions and my analysis to get their feedback. I felt that I should create a space in this thesis to give my participants a voice, an input in how they were to be represented in this written report. As one of the students, Rachana, told me before I left ‘make sure you tell people about our experience, they will learn from it.’ I sent the teachers and students emails after I left the research site to gauge if email might be a viable way of keeping in touch. I received delayed replies from three students; only one of the three teachers responded saying how very busy they were. One of the students, Elias, seemed willing to have a look at some transcriptions to offer his ‘take’ on things. I sent him a short excerpt from one interaction in which he was one of the speakers to get his opinion on what went on. His reply was brief and ambiguous, and I would have had to interpret his interpretation of the excerpt. The point here is that, participants cannot be expected to have the meta-skills necessary to analyse the data (Holmes and Schnurr 2005). Even if they had the time to take part in the elicitation procedures, they still might not be able to offer definitive interpretations. Furthermore, since the transcriptions were undertaken a few months after data collection, it would seem unlikely that they would be able to remember the details of the interaction. I do think that important insights may be gained from having participants’ input in the interpretation – but that would be under ideal conditions, and real-life research context is far from ideal, at least in my experience.

With regards to the validity of my interpretations, Tannen (2005: 50) offers a helpful notion called the ‘aha!’ factor which refers to instances when readers find that the analyst’s interpretation resonates with their own experience or knowledge. Put another way, the validity of the interpretations I offer is enhanced if while reading my interpretations of data extracts, the readers will say ‘aha’ because ‘something they have intuitively sensed will have been made explicit’ (Tannen 2005: 50).

I included my motivation for the research project, and my ontological and epistemological stance in Chapter 1. In this chapter I made visible the decision-making process I took during the research undertaking. I suggest that this ‘openness’ (Lillis 1998: 85) allows the readers to evaluate for themselves any potential bias that might have been obscured by my cultural interpretative background. While I made every attempt to support my interpretation based on evidence from data and literature, my sense making point of view is inevitably influenced by researcher attributes and circumstances.

3.6 ETHICS IN AN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT

Every discipline has its own code of ethics and in studies involving human participants, most codes revolve around three key concepts: voluntary and informed consent, confidentiality and protection of the respondents’ identity, and lastly, protection of the respondents from harm (Fontana and Fray 2005). To collect data from my participants, I had to gain ethical approval from the College of Western Canada (Appendix 8) and The Open University (Appendix 9). In my ethics applications, I stated that I would adhere to the published guidelines of the British Association of Applied Linguistics. There is indeed no shortage of guidelines regarding how researchers should behave in the field (Stutchbury and Fox 2009). However, as Small (1991: 405) argues, no code of ethics can substitute for the researcher’s own ability to assess the ethical

implications of their project. Below, I explore the ethical implications of transcribing non-native speaker discourse. I also examine the complexities that sharing commonalities with research participants may entail.

3.6.1 Transcribing *Non-native Speakers*' Talk

There is little guideline in the literature as to how to handle ethical dilemmas in transcription. Most codes of conduct detail confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent. Ethics applications require researchers to include how recorded data should be stored, protected and destroyed but there is not much guidance in terms of how to transcribe and represent participants in writing ethically (Victoria 2011).

Transcription is much more than the 'transformation' of audio recording into written texts. It can be argued that transcribing talk is really about 'transcribing people' (Roberts 1997: 170). The process itself entails ascribing utterances to particular speakers; utterances that are necessarily mediated by the researcher's interests, aims and circumstances. In the transcribed data used for this study, readers get a glimpse of my participants' identity through a language that is not the mother tongue of any of the students. When I was collecting my data, one participant told me, in a light-hearted manner, that if sections of the recording were 'not good,' that I should delete them. I interpreted 'not good' to refer to ungrammatical speech and mispronunciations. Following Lillis and Curry (2010: 178), I took up a position to transcribe as respectfully as possible by not using any non-standard spelling or transcription conventions indicating 'socially marked' accents that might stigmatize the speakers (Roberts 1997: 170). However, I did not make any grammatical corrections. I conclude in Chapter 7 that the participants, in spite of grammatical errors, were able to achieve the goals of their interaction.

The written transcription, perhaps due to its permanence and ‘frozen’ quality, does expose incorrect verb-subject agreements, missing third person ‘s’, and marked collocations. A wrong choice of word said in a fleeting moment is soon gone and forgotten but once transcribed, it acquires a different level of representation. Although the participants’ names have been anonymised, they could recognise themselves and each other in the transcripts. I have asked myself how my immigrant participants would feel reading their ‘ungrammatical’ sentence constructions. Would I be in any way ‘harming’ their self-confidence as English users? As non-native speakers of English, they seemed to me to be self-conscious about that part of their identity. I do not know; what I do know is that I have taken great care to ‘produce an account that respects the uniqueness, deficiency and exuberance of the communicative moment’ (Rampton 2007a: 5).

3.6.2 Shared Cultural and Linguistic Background

When I conducted the Scoping study in 2009, I was faced with an ethical dilemma emanating from sharing a common cultural and linguistic background with a participant. While on a journey to the Scoping study site, I found myself on the same bus with Teresa, a student in one of the classes I was observing. We made small talk about the weather and then I asked her about her life in Canada. She switched from Taglish (a mixing of *Tagalog* and English) into full *Tagalog* to talk about her personal circumstances. In the 40-minute bus ride, I learnt that she was a battered wife and the husband who had abused her had died, a few months earlier, of an alcohol-related illness. I did not expect Teresa’s level of self-disclosure but I thought that our shared ethnicity and mother tongue might have facilitated rapid intimacy. Teresa was able to express herself in a language that conveyed the intensity of her feelings. On the bus, we both spoke in *Tagalog* which created private space that separated us from the other bus

passengers who could hear but could not understand the words we were using. To this day, I still wonder if there was anything I said that might have encouraged her to disclose a very painful part of her life. I felt privileged that she trusted me with very personal information; I also felt very uncomfortable. Should I have tried to change the topic to prevent her from ‘spilling her guts out?’ Should I have taken her revelation as a cry for help and if so, should I have made some intervention? I am not sure how to respond to my own questions but part of the answer probably lies in my own inexperience as a researcher.

3.7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I adopted an ethnographic mentality throughout the process of data collection and data analysis and used ethnographic methods to collect my data. I have described my field work experience in the Scoping study and the Main Study phases of the research including accounts of the decision making process that went into selecting the field site, negotiating access, field work observation procedures and data management. I also described the transcription process as an important part of the analysis as well as the criteria I used to select excerpts that were analysed in this thesis. After the iterative process of engagement with the audio recordings, transcription and review of literature, I drew upon interactional sociolinguistics as the most suitable analytic framework that could handle the complexity of my data. Interactional sociolinguistics provided me with various resources – linguistics and discourse analysis, Goffman and conversation analysis and ethnography – with which to explore my data (Rampton 2007a). I ended the chapter by giving voice to nagging concerns regarding ethical implications of transcribing non-native speaker talk and of a shared cultural and linguistic background with participants. These ethical concerns were left open-ended, subject for further reflection.

PART II: DATA ANALYSIS

CHAPTER FOUR

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF COMMON GROUND: BUILDING ONE TEAM, ONE FAMILY

*This is our dream as we work together as one team, one family
hoping to be as the BIG FAMILY in Canada.*

Elias, research participant

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The excerpt above was part of a speech that Elias gave to welcome guests at a lunch that the EPPI class organised. He was nominated by the other students to speak on their behalf. The excerpt is a fitting prelude to this chapter which explores the strategies and resources that students and teachers use to lay the foundations for common ground or ‘one team, one family’. Common ground is the key analytic focus for this thesis which runs through the threads of the three analysis chapters. In Section 4.2 I delineate how common ground is used in this study. I also give a brief review of relevant literature on common ground. Section 4.3 sets up the interpretative context of this thesis. The extracts included in this chapter were taken from the first four weeks of the programme. As will become evident in the extracts in Section 4.3, a lot of ‘laying the foundations’ work seems to have taken place in the first four weeks of the programme. To set the scene, excerpts from two members of the EPPI class, a student and a teacher, from the beginning weeks are analysed to illustrate from members’ perspectives their experience of building one team, one family. Section 4.4 explores the strategies that students and teachers use to build their common ground or in CofP terms, to form a ‘very tight node of interpersonal relationships’ (Wenger 1998: 76). Section 4.5 deals with the repair strategies that participants use to preserve harmonious relations and heal

damaged faces. Section 4.6 presents a summary of the findings based on the data analysed.

4.2 COMMON GROUND

The lack of ‘common ground’ (e.g. shared experiences, shared assumptions and expectations) in intercultural contexts is often seen as one of the major contributors to miscommunication. In interethnic studies, in particular, it is claimed that the lack of shared communicative repertoire and socio-cultural knowledge make intercultural communication fraught with misunderstandings. It has been argued that the more common ground we share with another person, the less effort and time we need in conveying and interpreting information, or in Enfield’s (2008: 223) terms, ‘economy of expression.’

Interpreted in the broadest possible sense, common ground has been used as a cognitive construct to refer to the ‘sum of all the information that people assume they share’ (Clark 2009: 116) which may include world views, shared values, beliefs, and situational descriptions (Fant 2001: 79). My use of common ground in this study is very specific and based on my iterative engagement with the data. Common ground is deployed in this thesis to include shared knowledge, shared attitudes and feelings, shared relational identity and in-group membership. I discuss these dimensions of common ground below.

4.2.1 Common Ground as ‘Shared Knowledge’

Although it encompasses shared knowledge, the term common ground as deployed here does not refer to just *any* information that my research participants share. It refers to mutual knowledge as a result of interaction between participants. To give an example from my data, Faisal learnt in the first week of the program that Elias grew up

in Jordan and was a Muslim. In a subsequent interaction, as Elias was heading to the door to go to a job interview, Faisal called out to him and said *Inshallah* which means ‘God willing’ in Arabic. So, Faisal’s knowledge of Elias’s native language and religion from a previous interaction enabled him to convey good wishes. With one word, *Inshallah*, he let Elias know the he knew Arabic, and that they shared a common religion. In other words, he used his interactional knowledge to design his utterance specifically for Elias. A certain level of in-group membership was also simultaneously established and enacted between the two students. Indeed, it is argued that in addition to ‘economy of expression’ (Enfield 2008: 223) common ground also ‘affords a public display of intimacy’ in such a way that the more common ground is shared between interactants, the more interactional resources they can draw on in future interactions (ibid). The link that Enfield (2008) makes between economy of expression and display of intimacy is of relevance in this study. While Chapter 4 explores the beginnings of building intimacy, Chapter 5 examines extracts that show how the participants use words and expressions that are infused with meaning built out of interactional history.

Lee (2001: 41) whose concept of common ground has cognitive underpinnings, offers some useful terms in our discussion of common ground as a form of knowledge.

1. *Established* common ground
2. *Assumed* common ground
3. *As though* common ground

Established common ground involves the beliefs/knowledge that have been established in people’s previous interaction; *assumed* common ground is not established in talk but is believed to be a component of the *assumed* background information by virtue of membership of a similar community and other evidence not necessarily as a result of the interaction; *as though* common ground refers to new information – beliefs

and knowledge - that speakers invoke *as though* it is already part of common ground (Lee 2001: 41). For example, if I ran into an academic colleague at a bus stop and in the process of small talk, we found out that we both attended the same conference, this piece of knowledge belongs to *established* common ground as it resulted from our interaction. Once this common ground is *established*, it facilitates the creation of *assumed* common ground such as who gave the keynote address or which presentation was the best. And since we have *established* that we were both at that particular conference as common ground, we could invoke *assumed* common ground or shared knowledge that we have by virtue of having attended the same event. If my colleague asked me if I was planning to go to ‘the one in South Africa,’ that would be new information presented *as though* common ground. However, I would still be able to understand that ‘the one’ means next year’s conference and ‘South Africa’ would be the venue for the following year’s event. These three dimensions of common ground help to illuminate our understanding of why communication between people from the same cultural backgrounds may be easier to achieve. Once one piece of knowledge is established through interaction, common ground widens exponentially and speakers do not have to be very explicit. Each new piece of knowledge about a person for example, gets re-used as interactional resource in future interactions.

My use of common ground in this thesis includes *established* knowledge built up through shared history and experience, built over time through repeated interactions and mutual engagement. Within intercultural contexts, the establishment of common ground acquires a special significance. Indeed, the interactants’ ability to develop a common frame of reference can help facilitate communication. The more common ground interlocutors share with each other, the less effort and time they need in conveying and interpreting information (Enfield 2008: 223). As explained above, this

established common ground can be manipulated by speakers to include *assumed* and *as though* common ground (Lee 2001). The common ground accumulated over time allows for the creation of affiliational opportunities for the interactants (Enfield 2008) which can contribute to the formation of relationships. In turn, these relationships exert an influence in the development of participants' identities (Cupach and Imahori 1993: 113). To have common ground then, as used in this study, involves not only having shared knowledge arising from shared history, it also entails other interconnected and overlapping dimensions: relational identity and in-group membership, and shared feelings and attitudes.

4.2.2 Common Ground as 'Relational Identity' and 'In-Group Membership'

Identity refers to an 'individual's or group's sense of who they are, as defined by them and/or others' (Swann et al. 2004: 140-141). It is forged mainly through discourse, 'on-line, in ongoing situations' (Fant 2001: 81) so that every utterance a person makes contributes to the construction of their identity (Holmes 2005: 673). The way they speak and employ a particular conversational style, accent or language say something about who they are and what kind of relationship they have with others (Swann 2009: 199), and the membership they hold in one or more social groups (Kroskrity 2001: 106). The negotiation of shared or collective/group identity in interaction involves sharing codes, sharing assumptions and sharing topics (Fant 2001: 81). According to Fant (2001: 83), linguistic devices for sharing codes often involve the repetition of phrases or certain features of speech of the other interlocutor conveying a sense of 'rhythmical sharing'. Sharing assumptions does not mean expressing identical views but refers more to having similar presuppositions when opinions or views are shared; similarly, sharing

topics requires more than acknowledging a topic that the other person has proposed but collaboratively developing it. Within the context of intercultural friendships, relational identity has been investigated by Lee (2006: 18) who claims that it consists of the members' current and past personal and cultural experiences and values, their commonalities, interests and identities, and an established set of rules, roles and communication styles that guide their behaviour. He suggests that practices such as self disclosure, emphasising similarities and exploring differences, and conflict/conflict management promote the creation of a relational identity. In other words, relational identity is very much connected to the first dimension of common ground which is knowledge and social relations established from interaction (Cupach and Imahori 1993; Spencer-Oatey 2011). For instance, I may share a group or collective identity with other Filipinos by virtue of our having a shared language and having grown up in the same geographical area although I do not have a personal relationship with them. Identifying with a group of people because of pre-given attributes or interests differ from the shared identity that comes from mutual engagement and regular interactions overtime in the pursuit of shared goals.

Relational identity can also be viewed as in-group membership or an individual's perception that they belong to 'some set of persons who share specific wants, including goals and values' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 103). To claim common ground as-in-group membership, individuals have at their disposal three broad linguistic devices: first, conveying that they find the addressees' wants, goals or desired objects as also admirable or interesting; second, emphasising common membership in a particular group to accentuate similarities in wants, goals or interests; and lastly, claiming shared point of view, attitudes, knowledge and showing empathy (ibid: 102-103). Examples of linguistic realizations of stressing common ground are the use of in-group identity

markers and in-group language or dialect, avoiding controversial topics, seeking agreement and avoiding disagreement, presupposing/asserting/raising common ground (e.g. through small talk and gossip) and joking.

4.2.3 Common Ground as ‘Affective Convergence’

Implicated in the above dimensions of common ground as shared knowledge and relational identity are shared feelings and attitudes or ‘affective convergence’ (Aston 1993: 226). I suggest that these dimensions overlap and are always in interplay with each other. I include in this chapter a separate section on affective convergence because the sharing of feelings and attitudes seemed to be a particularly significant constituent of the EPPI common ground. Aston (1988; 1993) provides a useful scaffold to explore how the research participants go about building common ground as affective convergence, using the language of solidarity and support. More concretely, he explores the interactional strategies used by non-native speakers of English (NNS) to establish positive rapport and enhance friendly relations. It is claimed that friendly relations can be enhanced through the use of conversational strategies that display solidarity and/or support. Solidarity refers to the expression of similar concerns about aspects of reality (weather, recent events) or experiences that are common to both speakers; support means showing support towards the addressee’s state or experience which has not been experienced by the speaker. In other words, solidarity is ‘feeling as’ towards a common experience and support is ‘feeling for’ an unshared experience.

According to Aston (1988; 1993), there are different linguistic strategies that individuals can use to demonstrate solidarity: finding a common experience and related sentiments attached to a particular experience, agreeing with the addressees or repeating part of their utterance (which can show acceptance and approval of the previous utterance), topic shifting (which can be reflective of interlocutors’ desire to identify

shared concerns) and expressing sympathy. Negotiation of support may include strategies such as showing appreciation of the other speaker's contribution to the discourse (e.g. laughing at a joke, and showing appropriate emotions to anecdotes), giving compliments and apologising.

However, expressing solidarity and support is more complex in interactions between people from very diverse backgrounds. I am not concerned here with a superficial show of solidarity such as expressing shared dislike for the weather or traffic condition. Given a 'team/family' aspect of common ground, my interest is in exploring how the EPPI participants show affective convergence towards an aspect of their lived experience. Aston (1993: 233) suggests that negotiating solidarity and support requires that there should be 'affective grounds that warrant the feelings in question'. In order to share 'solidary' attitudes, the interlocutors need to have directly experienced features of the situation in question. Put another way, it is implied that showing empathy to someone who has had the experience of living in another country is 'warranted' if it comes from someone who has experienced living in another country. There is a difference between understanding someone's situation that one has never experienced versus showing solidarity or 'like-mindedness.' Negotiating support on the other hand, requires a sense of personal involvement and a relationship of 'caring and knowing' between the interactants (ibid: 234). Demonstrating a supportive attitude requires entitlement which is built up through intimacy and self-disclosure; supportive language means 'I can sympathize with you in so far as I have a personal involvement with you' (ibid: 234). In order to unpack common ground as affective convergence, we need to explore these questions: how do the EPPI participants who come from *different* backgrounds lay the foundations for *similarities* which seem a precondition for

negotiating solidarity?; how do they build the foundations for a *knowing and caring* relationship which is the basis for negotiating support?

4.3 THE STARTING POINTS

This section explores brief extracts from the first four weeks of the EPPI classroom phase to illustrate how students and teachers actively engaged in constructing the foundations of their common ground. To lay the ground work for the telling of the EPPI group's formation, I use brief extracts from one of the teachers, Tom, and one of the students, Elias. I find that the utterances of these two key characters particularly helpful in giving a meta-level overview of what had taken place in the EPPI class during the data collection. Their interactions were salient and because of their leadership roles, they exerted a major influence in shaping the interaction dynamics of the class. Tom, as the lead teacher, spent at least 17 of the 25 classroom hours per week with the students. Elias had a key role in the class as a ratified leader and a spokesperson. This role started when the EPPI class hosted a lunch and the students elected Elias to officially welcome and thank the guests on their behalf. Since then, he took on the roles of facilitator, emcee and spokesperson in the next two lunches that the class organised. Elias also coordinated group-oriented activities such as the coffee club and the class photo album and video project. He also assisted Kate in the computer class and gave supplementary computer lessons to the students twice a week. Because of his active engagement in the various facets of classroom activities, I found it useful to look to his utterances as a navigational guide in trying to make sense of what went on.

The two extracts below were uttered on two separate occasions – Tom's was in the second week, while Elias's was in the third week of the EPPI class:

Week 2, September 18, 2009

Tom: it's a very good opportunity for you to get to get to know each other BETTER, it's a really NICE (.) BONDING experience because we are we get to go into a erm into erm a setting and erm work as a TEAM.

Week 3, September 25, 2009

Elias: actually it is nice opportunity that today we feel we work as as a team, MORE than TEAM, we feel as a FAMILY here!

As shown above, a week after Tom made mention of the shared goal of building a team, Elias echoes his words the following week. He also uses the word 'team' but he extends it to the notion of 'family;' he also repeats the word 'opportunity' which can be viewed as a form of 'rhythmical sharing' which is a device to build shared identity (Fant 2001: 83). It was as if they were talking across time, expressing the same sentiments.

In line with my commitment to understand the standpoint of group members from their own viewpoint, I used Tom's and Elias's voices to begin to tell the story of the research participants' journey from September 8 to November 25, 2009 when they were together as a class. There are many other voices in this thesis but I used theirs as 'members' generalizations,' that is, 'what people themselves say about what they are doing' (Scollon and Scollon 2001: 19). It is vital that members of the in-group describe their own actions to ensure as much as possible that the researcher's own ethnocentric biases do not get in the way of the interpretation (ibid).

In the boxed extracts above, we saw Tom and Elias both appealing to team/family explicitly based on the lexical content of what they were saying. But as Scollon and Scollon (2001: 19) state, members' generalizations must be checked against

objective observations. Just because speakers say that building a team is important to them, does not mean that their actions are congruent with their words. In the next section, I make a closer inspection of Elias's and Tom's longer stretches of discourse within the context of the interaction.

Week 2 WS310042.18.09.09 Cooking class: We are the EPPI Team

First of all, a brief flashback to rationalize my choice of data extracts in this section. When I conducted the Scoping study six months before the main data collection, I met some of the teachers at the college including Tom, Marra and Greg. They were having lunch in the staff room/kitchen. I gave them a very brief idea of my study, and said that I was interested in analysing the linguistic strategies that non-native speakers of English use to make communication successful. The teachers unanimously agreed that 'it must be the cooking class,' which puzzled me because I could not see the connection between cooking and communication. When I asked them to clarify what they meant, they said that I would just have to see it for myself. Six months later, when I was given the classroom schedule before the main data collection, I noticed that a cooking class was an official part of the curriculum and was to take place in the third week of the programme. As it turned out, the students were as puzzled about what a cooking class was doing in an employment preparation programme of activities. Taken from week 2 of the classroom phase, Tom answers the students' query about the cooking class:

- 58 Tom Cooking class to ME is a a very good opportunity
59 to get to know everybody⁹, and it's a very good
60 opportunity for you to get to get to know each other BETTER,

⁹ The words/phrases underlined are focussed on in the analysis.

61 it's a really NICE (.) BONDING experience
62 because we are we get to go into a erm into erm a
63 setting and erm work as a TEAM
64 to complete a task (.) and the task has a really good pay off
65 because we get to prepare delicious food that all we get to enjoy
66 so it's a REAL good chance for US to to share
67 and laugh and tell stories and get to know each other! erm
68 it's also it's a really a good place for me to make some KEEN some
69 very keen observation about - about people's work habits,
70 erm if you're thrown into a situation
71 where you're not that familiar (.) how do you deal with it,
72 so it's a good opportunity to do that,
73 and it's also a good opportunity
74 to learn a new skill! so cooking is a good thing.
75 erm I am a big fan of cooking
76 I like cooking everyday.
77 I'm a big fan I'm all for cooking (.) so that's what it's all about (.)
78 but REALLY what it is it's kind of like erm
79 it's too bad we couldn't do it in the first week of class
80 but (xxx) because for a lot of reasons
81 it wouldn't have worked out

82 so I wanted to do it as soon as possible because

83 it is a way for us to GEL together so that we are the EPPI TEAM,

84 our identity erm (.) will now transcend erm the - erm the EPPI

85 the erm EPPI we'll be the the

86 EPPI team so that's REALLY why we cook so we become this

87 wonderful (.) (claps his hands once)

88 team where we where we hone our skills and enjoy erm LIFE!

89 because food is the celebration of life (.) okay,

The excerpt above demonstrates Tom's explicit goal for the EPPI class to be a team. He uses the word 'team' four times (lines 63, 83, 86, 88), as well as terms that invoke team spirit such as 'bonding' (line 61); 'gel together' (line 83); 'get to know everybody' (line 59); 'get to know each other' (line 60, 67); 'share' (line 67); and 'our identity will now transcend the the EPPI' (line 84). He uses the inclusive pronoun 'we' twelve times in the single turn. According to Poncini (2002: 353-354), the use of pronouns can give us important insights about how speakers negotiate individual and group identity, how they present themselves and how they relate to other participants. Tom's use of the inclusive 'we' suggests his wish for involvement and joint activity. It enables him to nurture solidarity, soften the exercise of power, and appeal to the achievement of common goals (Pullin-Stark 2007: 137).

Lines 68 to 74 give the impression of a distant Tom. He uses 'you' three times which disaffiliates him from the group and invokes his identity as someone in the position of institutional authority. As Tom is responsible for negotiating work experience placements for the EPPI participants, he reminds them that he will be observing 'people's work habits' (line 69). In lines 75 to 77, he goes back to being Tom,

not as someone in a position of authority but as someone who likes cooking and is a 'real fan of cooking.' From lines 78 to 79, he tells the students what the cooking class is 'REALLY' about – an opportunity to 'gel together' (line 83) and 'become this wonderful team' (line 87). He also refers to 'identity' transcending the EPPI (line 84). Note that the main aim of the EPPI programme was to help students increase their chances of finding and maintaining a job in Canada by teaching them job search skills and providing them with work experience. But line 84 (our identity will now transcend the –erm the EPPI) reflects Tom's desire for a group identity that goes beyond the institutional roles of teacher and students. From the whole utterance above, we see Tom invoking different identities – as a team member, as a team leader, as teacher, and as a 'regular guy' who is a 'big fan' of cooking.

A week later, after Tom's comments about the cooking class and being a team, the event took place in the college kitchen which was in the same building where the classes were held. The students spent the morning preparing a menu of honey-mustard chicken, vegetable-rice and Caesar salad. For dessert, they baked a cake complete with vanilla icing that spells out the name of the programme on top of the cake. The cake was a collaborative production by the students – from peeling and grating the carrots to mixing the batter to decorating the finished product (see Figures 8 and 9).



Figure 8 Photo: A Joint Production

The photo above shows two students using an improvised piping bag to decorate the cake and spell out E-P-P-I on top of it. Below is a picture of the EPPI carrot cake which was a joint-production by the students. I included the picture below because it shows that even after only three weeks of being together as a class, the students had started to establish a relational identity as members of the EPPI team:



Figure 9 Photo: The Finished Product¹⁰

¹⁰ For reasons of confidentiality and anonymity, the acronym of the spelled out in icing on top of the cake has been blurred.

As part of the culinary celebration, the students invited programme staff and teachers to partake in the meal that they had prepared. As mentioned earlier, Elias was elected by the other students to give the welcome remarks, below:

Week 3 WS310049.25.09.09 More than a Team

3 Eli Good afternoon everybody,
4 actually it's my pleasure here to make a speech
5 on behalf of my colleagues erm
6 welcome everybody of you xxx welcome here and
7 actually it is nice opportunity that today we feel we work as as a team,
8 MORE than TEAM, we feel as a FAMILY here!
9 so this is erm product (pointing to the spread of food) as OUR team work
10 and as erm a family work and erm hoping this xxx will get us closer
11 together each other knowing each other
12 because we are going to spend THREE (.) months
13 the reality that we are meeting erm you everyday
14 even more than our families where they are far away.
15 so m::y (.) feelings, as every one I guess that we'll become
16 REALLY family and friends and erm a
17 we'll be a NICE relation for a LONG time, and again
18 I would like to just a few minutes about this programme, actually
19 I would like to THANK the leaders of this programme

20 and I hope SUCCESS for this programme
 21 because success for this programme
 22 is success for all of US and ALL, so success of this programme
 23 that means (.) we'll soon find a place and it will be introduction
 24 to get a JOB towards to build our beautiful Canada. so this is our hope (.)
 25 hoping this will be come true, this is our dream as we work together as
 26 one team one family hoping to be as the BIG FAMILY in Canada to
 27 build our beautiful Canada and to get new JOBS as you see each of us
 28 have individual skills, so we are looking forward to ADD our skills
 29 towards building our beautiful Canada.

In the previous extract, I showed how Tom expressed his goal for the cooking class as an opportunity to forge team relations and transcend the EPPI identity. Elias not only echoes Tom's invocation of team, but he adds to it so that the shared goal translates into a negotiated, co-constructed vision or hints of the beginnings of a joint enterprise. As he puts it, 'MORE than TEAM, we feel as a FAMILY here!'(line 8). While *team* connotes a group of people working for a limited period of time, *family* suggests a long-term relationship which Elias says explicitly in line 17. Elias also demonstrates solidarity and pays homage to his teacher, whom he considers as the team leader, by echoing Tom's utterances the previous week. Elias's words 'will get us closer' (line 10) and 'knowing each other' (line 11) resonate with Tom's utterances (get to know each other better, bonding, gel together). His 'we'll be a nice relation for a long time' (line 17) seems to be a delayed uptake of Tom's reference about transcending the EPPI identity. Like Tom, Elias acknowledges the transactional goals of the programme

which is to ‘find a place’ (line 23), ‘place’ being a short form for work placement and ‘to get new jobs’ (line 27). He thanks the leaders of the programme (line 19) and then ends by invoking a powerful image of ‘one team one family’ (line 26). He weaves together multiple identities as a team member, a family member, a job seeker and as a Canadian immigrant. The last two lines of his welcome speech ‘individual skills, so we are looking forward to ADD our skills towards building our beautiful Canada [...]’ is an echo of what Tom said the previous week:

86 Tom EPPI team so that's REALLY why we cook so we become this
87 wonderful (.) (claps his hands once)
88 team where we where we hone our skills and enjoy erm LIFE!

Worth noting at this point is Elias’s reference to being a part of the big Canadian family (lines 24 – 29). I would argue that this is his immigrant identity being made salient in the course of the talk. Indeed, as an immigrant, it is probably reasonable to assume that one of his long term goals is to be part of the Canadian society. I show in Chapter 5, Section 5.6.2 that Tom affirms Elias’s appeal to family and validates his invocation of the big Canadian family. The point to be made here is the ‘negotiable’ quality of the shared goal, a constituent of the process of the joint enterprise which entails ‘continuous interaction, gradual achievement, and give-and-take’ (Wenger 1998:53).

The interconnectedness and coherence of Tom’s and Elias’ utterances in spite of a few days gap between talks can be interpreted as a kind of ‘affective convergence’ or intersubjectivity between speakers characterized by shared attitudes and feelings (Aston 1993: 87). Through his linguistic choices, Elias has made it visible that he (on behalf of the students) shares the same goals, wants and interests as Tom, that they are headed in

the same direction. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) terms, Elias has reassured the programme teachers and staff that what they want for the students, the students also want for themselves. If we take a closer look at Elias's utterances, we notice that he is not a native speaker of English. It is not only because of the grammatical errors (e.g. feel *as* vs. feel like a family; we'll *be* a nice relation vs. we'll have a nice relationship; we are looking forward *to add* vs. we are looking forward to adding) or marked collocations (e.g. introduction to get a job) but mainly because of the repetitive quality of his speech. In the last ten lines of his utterance, for example, he used the words 'success,' 'programme,' 'Canada' and 'hope/hoping' four times. A Canadian-born native speaker might use synonyms for Canada (this country, the Great White North, maple leaf/beaver/moose country, Canuckland) instead of repeating it four times. I would argue though that in spite of his linguistic infelicities and limitations, he was able to successfully use the available resources he had to make a point, reach his communicative goals and achieve a 'rhythmical sharing' of sentiments between him and Tom (Fant 2001: 84).

After Elias's 'More than a team' speech, Tom officially opened the buffet lunch and asked the guests to partake in the meal. Greg offered to say a few words:

- 27 Greg I just want to say something xxx
- 28 that speech is MAGNIFICENT very very nice (.)
- 29 it's made me feel good you know erm
- 30 we should have that one TAPED and (.) we should be able
- 31 to play that in one of those breakfasts you know, I like that FAMILY
- 32 and becoming Canadian erm very nice, very nice Elias, thank you.

Greg compliments Elias (lines 28 and 32) and affirms the latter's appeal to family (line 31). He describes how the speech made him feel (line 29, it's made me feel good) and uses superlatives (magnificent, very, very nice (2x) which perform solidarity and rapport-building functions (Brown and Levinson 1987). By agreeing with Elias and giving him compliments about his speech, Greg can be seen to accelerate his closeness towards the hearer and signal involvement (Scollon and Scollon 2001). Indeed it seems that Elias, Tom and Greg have collaboratively laid the foundations of their common ground by explicitly appealing to group cohesion as a team/family.

The cooking class/lunch was held on a Friday. The following Monday, Tom starts the morning with social talk about the previous week's cooking class:

Week 4	WS310050.28.09.09	Superheroes
76	Tom	I had a GOOD time! that's really, to tell you the truth in all
77		times that we've cooked, that's that's one of the
78		MOST enjoyable for me. <u>we seem to really get along WELL</u> (.)
79		and erm we're quite erm - I don't know if you notice it,
80		but <u>we're quite a good TEAM</u> (.) like we really, we
81		really like you know if one person's busy, another person
82		just JUMPS right in another person just jumps right in
83		there you know what I mean you know (.)
84		whenever people needed help there was somebody there,
85		kind of like we're superheroes or something [(laughs)]
86	Ss	[(laugh)]

Line 78 (we seem to really get along WELL) and line 80 (we're quite a good TEAM) sum up Tom's evaluation of the cooking class/lunch. He could have commented on other things such as the food, the cake or what the guests thought of the

lunch but instead he foregrounded the team quality of the class. Indeed, it is evident from the data analysed in this section which were recorded from weeks 2, 3 and 4 of the programme, that there is explicit appeal to team/family from Tom, Elias and also Greg. In the next section I show other examples that illustrate how the teachers and students create the building blocks of common ground through language.

4.4 ERECTING THE BUILDING BLOCKS

How have the EPPI participants' practices contributed to the building of common ground, of one team, one family? Some answers to this question are explored through data extracts taken in the formative weeks of the EPPI class. It should be noted at the outset that most of the examples in this section were taken from data that include the two teachers, Tom and Greg. Given the classroom context, it is perhaps to be expected that a big portion of the recordings consists of teacher talk. However, the teacher data analysed here were selected not mainly because there were more of them in the corpus but because the teachers seemed to make an extra effort towards building common ground with the students. I would argue that this relates to Aston's notion of establishing grounds for solidarity and support.

4.4.1 Sharing Experience: Stories and Salient Identities

According to Wenger (1998: 184), the work of engagement involves different processes such as the 'accumulation of a history of shared experiences' and 'a sense of interacting trajectories that shape identities in relation to one another'. In most adult education or university classrooms, and even in workplaces, getting to know highly private information about other members usually takes place gradually and informally, over a period of time. This is not the case with the EPPI where self-revelation seems to be a formal and official part of the curriculum.

Week 1, Day 1 Dealing with Grief from Loss

Sharing personal stories as a way to build common ground became evident on the very first day of the programme. The morning was spent discussing ‘Dealing with Grief from Loss.’ Tom showed a PowerPoint presentation of the widely known Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's bereavement cycle (shock/denial-anger-bargaining-depression/withdrawal-acceptance). He encouraged the students to discuss their feelings about leaving their homelands. Displayed on the white board during the discussion were these two quotes:

*All changes even the most longed for have their melancholy
for what we leave behind is a part of ourselves.
We must die to one life before we can enter into another.*
Anatole France

He that lacks time to mourn lacks time to mend.
Shakespeare

I would argue that the above quotes from Anatole France and Shakespeare can be interpreted as an invitation to ‘mourn,’ to speak of the losses associated with emigration and immigration. In my research journal for that day, I wrote:

Week 1, Day 1 Research Journal

I thought that the students would be hesitant about sharing their personal stories to a bunch of strangers. After all, they signed up for an employment preparation class, not a bereavement/support group. But I was surprised at how open they were.

As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, I did not make any recordings nor take any observation notes in the first week of observation. In my research journal, I wrote how Phillip talked about the horrors of the war in Congo and how grateful he felt for being allowed to live in Canada with his family. Rachana felt sad that her husband's PhD in an Indian university was interrupted but that she admired him for his resilience. Jinky said she would have been promoted had she not left her job in the Philippines. She also talked about the difficult decision-making process leading up to the move to Canada. Faisal was not sure if he wanted to be in Canada or not. He said it was his wife's idea to leave Bangladesh to pursue better opportunities in Canada. Similarly, it was not Velyvet's decision to leave Haiti; his wife and family convinced him that life was safer in Canada. Elias had to give up a United Nations job in Jordan when he migrated and he said that he often wondered if it was the right decision. Harleen did not start on the same date as the others so she was obviously not present for the grief/loss session. It can be argued that the building of common ground by the sharing of personal stories had, since the first day, been an integral part of the EPPI programme.

The students' narratives were to evolve into a shared set of resources or repertoire available to be recycled for future engagements (Wenger 1998: 83). I would argue that the sharing of personal narratives was an important foundation for building common ground. The grief session served as a discursive space for students and their teacher to erect the building blocks for a jointly negotiated enterprise of team and family. Indeed it has been claimed that self-disclosure is an important step towards the development of a close relationship as it helps individuals clarify/validate their identities in relation to the other (Adler, Rosenfeld and Proctor 2007: 297).

Week 2 Interpersonal/Intercultural Skills Class

As stated in the previous chapter, Greg's course *Interpersonal/Intercultural Skills* took place three afternoons a week. Its main aim, according to the programme brochure, was to improve the students' interpersonal skills and intercultural understanding to the level required in a professional workplace. The first three sessions were devoted to 'getting to know each other' activities, in addition to familiarizing the students with the course books and materials. The students were asked to give a 'Lifecycle' presentation about different milestones in their lives. Excerpts from these presentations were included in the Methodology chapter, Section 3.4.2.4. It will be recalled that the students included narratives about their family members both in Canada and in their home countries, deaths of loved ones, saddest and happiest experiences, and hopes for future employment. Below is an extract from Jinky's ('Jink' in the transcripts) Life cycle presentation in Greg's class. Note that shorter forms of participant pseudonyms are used due to spacing constraints of column layout. I use Mab (short form of Mabel) for lines of text where I have an audible participation.

Week 2 WS310032.17.09.09 I am the only child

- 1 Jink so I'm Marina Jinky Reyes, Jinky for short
- 2 or whatever you you you like to call me (.)
- 3 so I was born in Manila in Manila city Philippines.
- 4 my parents are - I mean I am the only child (.) but my my
- 5 when when my parents separated, - my husband
- 6 remar- erm (self-corrects) my FATHER remarried (laughs)
- 7 and erm they have one daughter as well
- 8 so we are two in the family, but my my sister
- 9 is like I'm thirteen years older than her

10 so she just erm graduated from college (.) and I went to school (.)

11 I went to school and finished school in the Philippines

12 and then worked there for more than ten years, and (.)

13 erm since my parents were separated when I was a child

14 I was left under the custody of my erm paternal

15 grandparents, whom I whom I was very close to especially

16 with my grandmother (.) whom I called MAMA

17 and but when I was when I was seven years old in 1981,

18 my paternal grandmother died and I was (.) and after

19 she left erm I was left under the custody of my aunt

20 whom I called MOMMY, //

21 Greg // not TITA! ((aunt))

22 Mab (laughs quietly)

23 Jink no, not TITA (laughs)

24 So I was (.) so I am I am complete, I have *mama* ((mom))

25 [and *PAPA*] ((dad)), I have mommy and daddy.

26 Greg [hummm]

27 Jink my mommy and daddy are my aunt and my uncle.

28 they're not husbands, they are they are brothers and sisters (.)

29 and my *tatay* ((dad)) and *nanay* ((mom)) is my real parents. (laughs)

30 so xxx //

31 Greg // and you're ATE! ((big sister))

32 Mab (laughs quietly)

33 Jink sorry?

34 Greg I said you're ATE! ((big sister))

35 Jink yes, I'm an *ate*! (smiles) so, erm things that are important
36 to me in my life, one of which is
37 my paternal grandma who's been one of the most important
38 to me, that I could and would never forget her.
39 and (.) erm (.) my family right now and my aunt and her family
40 actually erm actually since I was since I was erm reared and cared for
41 by my grandparents and my aunt it's more like erm
42 I'm more of I'm more closer to my aunt (.) and her family
43 than my real father, and erm (.) things about my life (looks in her notes)
44 things I like about my life, although I haven't I haven't
45 had a complete family of my own like with my parents
46 erm I haven't experienced the the real family how it feels
47 to be with them but (.) I was lucky I have my aunt whom
48 I call MOMMY and with her I felt the motherly love
49 that I missed (2.0) and erm (2.0) and also with my grandparents (3.0) and
50 (13.0) yeah, (eyes started to tear up)
51 maybe I should go with more questions.

The above excerpt shows both Jinky and Greg working towards affective convergence (Aston 1993), each one deploying different strategies. Jinky invites intimacy through her self-disclosure while Greg makes salient his knowledge of *Tagalog* words. I shall come back to Greg's strategy later, but first about Jinky. She could have talked about her immediate family – her husband and two children who were with her in Canada but she chose to talk about her extended family in the Philippines. She makes salient her immigrant identity as being far away from home and evokes images of herself as an 'unwanted' child of separated parents, left in the care of her

grandmother and then an aunt (lines 13 – 20). Although she has never known what it is like to have a ‘real’ family (line 46), she says that she is lucky to have an aunt and grandparents who gave her motherly love (lines 47 - 49). She had tears in her eyes when she finished her presentation. It can be argued that what she chose to talk about in class can be categorized as belonging to a set of ‘restricted attitudes’ or information that people only tell those whom they trust and believe will show care and support for them (Aston 1988: 305). Indeed, it can be argued that our level of self-disclosure whether of facts and attitudes depend on the degree to which we think our interlocutors might affiliate with those facts and attitudes (Aston 1988: 305). So by invoking an identity of an immigrant who misses an aunt who showed her love more than her own biological parents, Jinky opens up a window to her private world as she contributes her narrative to the group’s pool of shared repertoire. By expressing private feelings usually reserved to intimates, she inevitably constructs her audience as close relations (Pomerantz and Mandelbaum 2005). Most importantly, she creates a ‘preparatory sequence’ (Aston 1988: 307) for relational work as Greg builds his common ground with her using her narrative as resource.

Using the same extract above, I now focus on Greg’s uptake of Jinky’s self-revelation. In line 21 (not *TITA!*), Greg displays his knowledge of *Tagalog* (*Tita* is the *Tagalog* word for aunt). He does the same in lines 31 (and you’re *ATE!*) and 33 (I said you’re *ATE!*). *Ate* is the *Tagalog* word for big sister. Jinky’s (line 22, line 35) and my reaction (line 22) was amusement signalled by smile and laughter. As a native speaker of *Tagalog*, I laughed because I was surprised that Greg knew some *Tagalog* which he continued to display throughout the duration of the course. I laughed because I thought that the way he pronounced *Ate* and *Tita* with a Canadian accent was funny. With his use of *Tagalog*, Greg claims common ground and establishes rapport with Jinky. Why

this particular strategy? He could have expressed empathy or sympathy towards Jinky; he could have given her some suggestions on how she might deal with loneliness of being away from her aunt; he might have tried to lighten the atmosphere when Jinky started to cry – but he did not. Out of all the options open to Greg, he chose to make visible his knowledge of *Tagalog*. I argue that his linguistic choice reflects his effort to initiate building grounds for solidarity and in-group membership, in Aston's (1988; 1993) terms. Establishing warrants for solidarity may take special effort on Greg's part by virtue of his being 'Canadian'. There is a risk of being perceived as patronizing if he expressed shared attitude or feelings towards Jinky's experience without having personally experienced those events (e.g. being raised by extended family members). Greg was born and bred in the province where the research was being carried out. So, in that classroom he was the 'outsider' in a room full of multilingual, non Anglo-Saxon immigrants who were thousands of miles away from their countries of origin. Negotiation of solidarity is therefore problematic as he cannot easily draw from similar experiences as the students'. Strategies for showing entitlement for supportive attitude in an intimate manner also seem limited. As Aston (1993: 234) suggests, 'grounds for sharing attitudes in the supportive sense lie in the nature of the relationship between interactants in such a way that 'I can sympathise with you insofar as I have a personal involvement with you.' However, as the interaction happened only a few days into the course, it might be perceived as imposing and insincere for Greg to claim personal involvement with Jinky. In Aston's terms, Greg does not 'know' her enough to 'care about' her without risking being perceived as insincere. Using *Ate* and *Tita* allows Greg to invoke a second language learner identity thereby establishing commonality with the students. Moreover, what is noteworthy here is not that he could utter a few foreign words but it is in the type of words he knew: *Tita* and *Ate* are both familial terms.

At the end of the students' 'Lifecycle' presentations, Greg adds his own narrative to the growing collection of the group's shared repertoire. Below he talks about his wife whose head injury affected the emotional side of her brain:

Week 2 WS 310032.17.09.09 Thank God to the Filipino country

29 Greg my wife learns everything now, everything that she is emotionally (.)
30 she has learned over the last five years.
31 so it's it's taking it's toll both ways, but you know what
32 the doctor told me, she's never going to be a person again. So
33 put her in a home (2.0) so I made the decision that I WOULD NOT
34 put her in a home. AND thank God, to the Filipino country
35 Philippines I'm a happy man again because
36 I have Filipinas in my house who do SO MUCH
37 for me that I can be here,

Above, Greg foregrounds the identity of a responsible and loving husband who refuses to put his wife in an institution for the brain-injured (lines 29 – 34). He intersperses his narrative with talk about having Filipina caregivers who take care of his wife (lines 34 – 37). His use of the words 'Filipino,' 'Philippines' and 'Filipinas' in a single sentence can be argued as indications of a very explicit claim for common ground by association. Making salient his hiring of Filipino caregivers may also add to the creation of a culturally sensitive identity, of someone who is tolerant of other cultures. As he continues his talk, below, Greg tries to draw parallels between him and the students:

38 Greg life is really really difficult, I could be retired now
39 and living in the country, but I'm NOT. so things change,
40 life changes (.) you guys are in a position right now

41 where I was in February 1st 2005. my life was altered
42 (xxx) that day because my wife fell almost DIED,
43 months in intensive care, full year in a hospital,
44 things CHANGED. you guys are in that state of flux right now.
45 all your lives are changing. YOU need to WORK,
46 that's who you are, partially and by working you can fulfil
47 the obligations for a family. I UNDERSTAND that. and that's
48 why you're here. just keep dreaming, keep going.

When Greg says ' you guys are in position right now where I was in February first two thousand and five' (lines 41 and 42), he is making a strong claim for common ground as in-group membership. He reminds the students that just like them, he belongs to the same set of persons with the same values and beliefs (Brown and Levinson 1987). Throughout the next ten weeks, Greg would appeal to his 'Filipino-ness' by using new *Tagalog* words that he learnt from his wife's Filipina caregivers. On some occasions, he would ask Jinky about specific information about the Philippines. In the last day of the class, he actually brought his wife and his wife's caregiver to the college and introduced them to the students.

Tom, whose wife was Filipino, also used this national culture affiliation as a resource in building a case for 'entitlement' (Aston 1988: 269) to in-group membership and affective convergence. As Aston (1988; 1993) suggests, the strategies involved in achieving affective convergence between people who have diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds differ from the strategies that those who come from similar backgrounds may deploy. It is further claimed that 'entitlement to hold attitudes can derive not strictly from our own experience, but also from others with whom we can

claim some sort of affective tie, whose experience matters to us given the closeness of our relationship with them' (Aston 1988: 230).

Thus, since Tom and Greg could not lay claim to the obvious common ground (shared experience of immigration, non-native speakers of English, shared goal of looking for employment) that students had, they used their close relationships (Tom's wife, Greg's caregivers) creatively to invoke shared ethnic association. As Simon and Oakes (2006: 109) state, 'shared identification produces a shared perspective on the world and hence an expectation of agreement – if we are the same, facing the same relevant stimulus, we should see the same thing and feel the same about it '.

The extract below shows Tom making salient his wife's Filipino identity. Like Greg, I argue that he uses what can be called a 'Filipino identity-by-association' strategy.

Week 3 WS310050.28.09.09 How do you know my wife is Filipino?

- 109 Tom you know how I KNOW my wife is Filipino?
- 110 do you know how I know that? (.) because when it was win- windy
- 111 on Sunday, she wore a PARKA to church!
- 112 Ss (laugh)
- 113 Tom (laughing) NOW you know she's FILIPINO!
- 114 Ss (laugh)
- 115 Tom because she she had her hood ON (laughs)!!
- 116 Jink // [I see!] (laughing)
- 117 Ss // [(laugh)]
- 118 Tom her little FUR hood (.) like THIS (makes gestures)
- 119 Ss (laugh)
- 120 Tom and I go 'dear, this ISN'T CO::LD!"

121 Ss (laugh)

122 Tom I don't know (.) it's not THAT cold but it's COLD for a FILIPINO,

Line 122 above shows that although Tom does not think it's 'THAT cold', he is able to sympathize with his wife. This may seem like an insignificant statement but considering that two of the students, Rachana and Faisal have never experienced Canadian winter before, it constructs him as person who can relate to those who may have a different concept of 'cold.' It bears mentioning that Tom's amusing anecdote above is just one of many instances of small talk and use of humour in the corpus which can be seen as useful strategies for creating team (Holmes and Marra 2004), claiming common ground (Brown and Levinson 1987) and showing involvement (Scollon and Scollon 2001).

In the previous chapter, I noted that there were two other teachers involved with the EPPI: Kate, the computer instructor and Marra who team-teaches with Tom on some occasions but was largely in-charge of liaising with work placement employers. I noted that there was no instance of Marra in the corpus talking about her Canadian husband the way that Tom talked about his Filipino wife or Greg about his Filipino caregiver. There was also no instance of her making salient her identity as a Colombian and an immigrant. Although it is not a definitive interpretation, I suggest that for Marra, there was no need to make an explicit claim for common ground or to create warrants for solidarity and supportive attitude. Tom and Greg, on the other hand, had more interactional benefits to gain from constructing a multicultural identity through close relations with Filipinos (see Hansen 2005 for a discussion on how ethnicity can be deployed as a resource; Otsuji and Pennycook 2010 for how fixity and fluidity of cultural identities are negotiated through language). They were able to use these

affiliations as a way to create commonalities by obscuring cultural differences (Bucholtz and Hall 2004: 371).

4.4.2 Using Humour

In this section, I show how the meaning of teasing as a form of humour came to be associated with affection and liking within the EPPI group.

The EPPI students and teachers enjoyed laughing together. Over time, as is shown in Chapter 5, humour became an integral aspect of their ‘shared ways of engaging in doing things together’ (Wenger 1998: 125). Following Holmes and Marra (2002: 1693), humour is used here to refer to utterances ‘which are identified by the analyst, on the basis of paralinguistic, prosodic, and discoursal clues, as intended by the speaker(s) to be amusing and perceived to be amusing by at least some participants’.

Below, the class was getting ready to go for a field trip to a job centre. Elias walked into the room a few minutes late. Tom teases him:

Week 2 WS310028.15.09.09 Officially being teased

18 Tom we have it we have it on tape that you're late! (laughs) (points to
researcher's audio recorder on the table)

19 Ss (laugh)

20 Mab I'm counting the number of times that you're late, Elias. (laughs)

21 Ss [(laugh)]

22 Mar [September fifteen,] one o'clock it's one- oh- two, Elias!

23 Ss (laugh)

Marra (line 22) and I (line 20) immediately knew what Tom was trying to do so we joined in the tease. But there is no uptake from Elias; he does not realise that Tom's contextualization cues (laughter, playful intonation) signal playfulness. Tom explains,

‘you are OFFICIALLY being TEASED’ two times (lines 24 and 26). Elias obviously does not know what ‘teased’ meant (line 27), nor does Velyvet (line 31).

- 24 Tom you are, [(laughs)] you are OFFICIALLY being TEASED (laughs)
- 25 Ss [(laugh)]
- 26 Tom how does it feel Elias, you're OFFICIALLY being TEASED.
- 27 Eli [teased?]
- 28 Mar [(laughs)]
- 29 Mab uhum
- 30 Tom TEASED.
- 31 Vely just what did you say this word? (asks Tom)
- 32 Tom oh don't think too hard about it (laughs) just tell me how you feel.
- 33 Ss (laugh)
- 34 Eli (puzzled look)
- 35 Tom ‘I feel not good, Tom, don't tease me’ (laughs)
- 36 Eli yeah I think there are some criticism because you know xxx yeah

Based on Elias’s puzzled look in line 34 and his reference to ‘criticism’ in line 36, the meaning of the word ‘tease’ still seemed unclear to him. So Tom, in the next extract, explains that teasing means ‘a sign of affection’ (line 39), ‘we like somebody’ (line 40), ‘I ACCEPT you’ (line 44), and ‘people like you’ (line 53).

- 37 Tom oh we weren't being serious Elias, we were TEASING you!
- 38 Eli I know, [that's good (laughs)]
- 39 Tom [being teased] is a sign of affection,
- 40 that means we like somebody
- 41 if I didn't tease you then you should be worried (.)
- 42 that means I don't like you! (laughs)

43 Ss (laugh)

44 Tom so if I tease you that means I ACCEPT you.

45 Eli okay, that's GOOD,

46 Ss (laugh)

47 Tom so - now now, how do you feel?

48 Ss (laugh)

49 Tom now [(xxx)]

50 Ss [laugh]

51 Eli [I feel better]

52 Tom you feel better, okay, that's right, so if you get teased, it's usually

53 it's good natured that means people like you

Tom's use of explicit language to help Elias understand his teasing intentions approximates Gumperz's (1982) contextualization cues except of course it is recipient-designed. Tom had to take into account Elias's non-verbal and verbal signals to know that he was not familiar with the concept of 'being teased'. There might be a difference of socio-cultural knowledge and expectations regarding the use of teasing. But the point to be stressed from the above example is the importance of being explicit in the 'laying the foundations' phase of building common ground. Members need to know the interim rules of the game before they can even start negotiating new norms.

In the extract below, Tom had just explained what was going to happen in the cooking class. He told the students that the main course was going to be honey-mustard chicken. Jinky starts to tease Phillip about killing the chicken:

Week 2 WS31003142.18.09.09 Live Chicken

108 Jink so is Phillip going to kill the chicken? (laughs)

109 Ss (laugh) (simultaneous multi-party speech)

110 Eli you should bring a live chicken and he will do the rest! (laughs)

111 Ss (laugh) (loud laughter from Phillip)

112 Tom that's not (laughs) that's not the Canadian way! (laughs)

113 Eli and before that somebody will run after them//

114 Ss // [(laugh)]

115 Eli [(laughs)] to catch them. just bring them and xxx

116 Tom I have never (laughs) I have never heard that one before (laughs)

117 Ss [(laugh)]

118 Tom [(laugh)] I really don't know what to say!//

119 Ss // (laugh)

120 Tom but that's if you really feel the need to do that Phillip, then you go ahead.

121 Ss [(laugh)] (loud laughter from Phillip)

122 Tom [(laughs)] I mean if you (laughs) just don't do it in here.

123 Ss (laugh)

124 Tom do it in the back alley, [(laughs)]

125 Ss [(laugh)]

126 Tom safer for all!

The above episode, which occurred three days after the 'Officially being teased' extract can be seen as an uptake of Tom's notion of teasing as an expression of liking and affection. Phillip, the centre of the tease, was a very well-liked member of the group. The extract shows the collaborative and co-constructed nature of the interaction. Jinky's line 108 (is Phillip going to kill the chicken) is tightly linked to Tom's topic of cooking class menu. Elias's contribution in line 110 (you should bring the chicken and he will do the rest) is a seamless uptake from the humour sequence initiated by Jinky. Tom initially does not know how to react or what to say (lines 116, 118) but in line 120,

he goes along with the tease and tells Phillip that he has his permission to kill the chicken as long as he does it in the back alley for the sake of everyone's safety (lines 120, 122, 124, 126).

Humour in the form of teasing, as shown in the two episodes above, is an important building block in the EPPI's establishment of common ground because it facilitates the creation of an environment of caring and knowing (Aston 1988; 1993). It serves as an appeal to involvement, solidarity and rapport building (Dyrel 2008) – in the spirit of 'creating team' (Holmes and Marra 2004). And as emphasised by Tom, teasing means liking, affection and acceptance.

4.4.3 Giving Approval and Compliments

Giving approval/compliments contributes to the creation of team (Holmes and Marra 2004), the negotiation of support (Aston 1988; 1993), and the building of common ground because it fulfils members' needs to belong and to be admired (Brown and Levinson 1987). Furthermore, implicit in the approval or compliments is shared values and assumptions. For example, when a teacher compliments a student for assisting another student solve a math problem, we may assume that the teacher (as well as the student) values cooperation and helpfulness. Giving compliments, indeed, invokes association with the addressee's interests and thus, can be seen as a means of demonstrating supportive discourse (Aston 1993: 231) or giving the gift of praise (Brown and Levinson 1987).

There were many instances of giving approval in my data and they were mostly from teachers to students. Given the institutional nature of the talk and the pedagogical context, this is hardly surprising. When students give the correct answers, the teachers say 'very good' or 'job well done' in the fashion of Initiation-Response-Feedback (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975) or Initiation-Response-Evaluation (Mehan 1979) model:

teacher elicits or asks a question, student answers and teacher takes the third turn to evaluate student's response. I was interested in instances of compliments/approval giving that were not simply the F/E move in an IRF/E exchange. My focus was on compliments/approval giving occurrences that have team/family building functions. For example, in the extract below, Greg was expressing how he felt after the students gave their 'Lifecycle' presentations:

Week 2 WS310021.14.09.09 Hard to retire

- 44 Greg it's HA::RD to retire when you come in to classes like this,
45 S [uhum]
46 Greg [like it is] just so HARD (.) I come in and I get so energized and so,
47 it is like I have one of the best jobs a person can have!

Unlike a typical feedback/evaluation in an IRF exchange, the above utterance from Greg is intimate and personal as he discloses how it would be very hard for him to retire (lines 44 and 46) because of the energy he gets from the class. Line 47 (one of the best jobs in the world) has an 'element of exaggeration' which in Brown and Levinson's (1987: 101- 2) politeness terms, indicates the desire of the speaker to fulfil the listeners' needs for belonging, liking and admiration.

Three days after the above extract, Greg compliments the class following a problematic interaction between two students, which I analyse in Section 4.5.2. Greg seemed touched by how the two students resolved their differences in front of the whole class; he expresses his sentiments:

Week 2 WS 310032.17.09.09 Energy

- 1 Greg I have told you I have a disabled wife (.), she is brain-injured (.) and she
2 erm and she needs care twenty four seven care so

3 I get tired some days and I xxx but I still
 4 come to form because of the energy I get out of the class
 5 but I'm up TWICE a night and so (.) I sleep at MOST three hours

Similar to the previous utterance in 'Hard to retire,' there is an element of self-disclosure (lines 1, 3 and 5) embedded in the compliments (line 4) which makes the utterance very intimate. Greg also constructs an identity of a loving and patient husband who cares deeply for his wife. Also similar to his earlier utterance, he mentions the energy (line 4) that he gets out of the class which can be interpreted not only as approval of the group, but also gratitude to them for making him feel energized.

Below is another instance of giving compliments, this time from Tom. The 'Hilda' he is referring to in line 67 is the academic support worker who provides the students with individual support on speaking fluency:

Week 4 WS310056.30.09.09 Breath of fresh air

67 Tom I had a short meeting with Hilda this morning.
 68 she's very impressed with you guys,
 69 she's very impressed with this group, she told me that
 70 erm basically her her attitude towards working with EPPI
 71 is like a BREATH OF FRESH AIR
 72 when people from this class when you spend time with Hilda
 73 you're very focused on what you want and
 74 you have a real POSITIVE approach, so so

Tom repeated 'very impressed' twice (lines 68 and 69) and praised the students (line 73, 74) which signal his intention to enhance the positive face of the addressees. There are two implicit messages in Tom's utterances above. First, by talking about the meeting with Hilda, he lets the students know that he is interested in their overall

progress. Second, by complimenting them on their focused and positive attitude, he gives the message that he has the same wants, goals and values that the students want for themselves – an indication of an appeal to in-group membership and mutually defining identities. As a positive politeness strategy, Tom can be seen to fulfil the students' needs for admiration and liking (Brown and Levinson 1987).

So far, I have discussed the different ways in which the EPPI participants contribute to laying a strong foundation for common ground. The negotiated joint enterprise is the shared goal of building a team/family. In the next section, I show that building common ground between people from diverse backgrounds may be challenging, thus requiring a conscious and concerted effort to repair possible damages.

4.5 PROTECTING THE FOUNDATIONS: REPAIR STRATEGIES

It has been claimed that conflicts are a normal part of shared participation. In most established CofPs, members have guidelines and policies negotiated over time that help them navigate through problematic situations (Lave and Wenger 1991: 116). In the case of the EPPI, at least in the beginning of the group's existence, the rules of interpersonal conduct needed to be negotiated *in situ*. The point to bear in mind is the attention and the work that the participants put into the early and delicate stages of building common ground. The conscious effort to make sure that the foundations are laid out properly is exemplified by Greg below:

4.5.1 Minor Repair work

Week 3 WS310060.30.09.09 A bit of latitude

- 1 Greg just erm (.) I think I rambled the last time and erm I apologise for that
- 2 erm sometimes this stupid erm I took some Prednazone, and Prednazone

3 sometimes gives me mood swings and so (.) last day I went home and
 4 erm I re-analysed what I said (.) and sometimes I say (.) you know and
 5 then I think (.) whoaa:h (.) did I say that you know, so xxx (frowns)
 6 Ss (laugh)
 7 so you know if I threw something out there that erm was a little bit off,
 8 please give me a little bit of LA::TITUDE.

Greg apologises for his ‘rambling’ the last time he was with the class (line 1). In lines 3 and 4, he constructs an identity of a teacher who places a high value in his students’ interests and welfare – he thinks about them even after work (lines 3 and 4). Lines 7 and 8 foreground his desire not to threaten the common ground he has thus far built with the students : ‘if I threw something out there that erm was a little bit off, please give me a little bit of LA::TITUDE’. In Chapters 5 and 6, I also show different instances of apologising which I argue has evolved into one of the EPPI participants’ shared repertoire.

4.5.2 Major Repair work

There were two serious conflicts that occurred during data collection; both occurred within the first four weeks of the 12-week programme. The fact that they took place in the formative stage of the EPPI common ground is probably an indication that norms were actively being negotiated. I discuss one of the conflicts in this section and the other one in Chapter 6 as it clearly has to do with misunderstanding. I decided to include both examples in this thesis because they concern the whole class, witnessed by students and teachers.

The extract below was taken after Elias gave his ‘Lifecycle’ presentation in Greg’s class. He talked about his family, his past career with the United Nations, and

his life in Jordan and how much he wished to return to Palestine. The students were given the opportunity to ask Elias some questions; Phillip starts:

Week 2 WS310021.14.09.09 As I am a criminal

1 Phil h-how how many kids you have?

2 Eli kids? yeah, I have one beautiful girl and four boys, five.

3 Phil because in July, this year, in Ontario the police found FOUR (.) women

4 KILLED (.) at the bottom of a [small ri-river,]

5 Eli [uh-huh] (looks puzzled)

6 Phil at the beginning, it was thought that it was erm (.) just

7 an ACCIDENT, after investigation, they came to conclusion that

8 they was the-they were KILLED! [so]

9 Eli [hmmnn] (looks confused)

10 Phil so what happened was the father agreed with his son and this other boy

11 to kill (.) THREE (.) daughter and one (.) woman, so four (.)

12 so it was a HONOUR (.) crime (.) the man was from Afghanistan

13 and came to Montreal, he was a businessman //

14 Eli // businessman, yes. //

15 Phil // so my question IS (.) (though?) the father did that because the the one

16 of the girl (.) got a boyfriend and the other, the others wanted to li::ve

17 EXACTLY like Canadian.

Phillip starts with a seemingly innocent question in line 1, ‘how many kids you have.’ He then proceeds to give a narrative about a news report (lines 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8); in lines 10 to 13, he goes on to say that the four women found dead at the bottom of a river were victims of an honour killing. In lines 12 and 13 the phrase ‘the man was from Afghanistan’ begs the question, ‘why this information now?’ In order to recover a

plausible interpretation of ‘Afghanistan,’ we need to be able to get out of the micro analysis and include the bigger context. Afghanistan is a predominantly Muslim country. It is common knowledge amongst the teachers and students of the EPPI that Elias is Muslim. By saying that the father who perpetrated the honour killing is Afghan, Phillip is evoking associations with Islam and implying that Elias and his family may share the same tradition – a clear and damaging threat to Elias’s face. Greg intervenes:

18 Greg Phillip! Phillip!

19 Phil yeah,

20 Greg TIME OUT! He doesn't have to answer this.

21 Phil OK (laughs) because my question was //

22 Greg //(laughs) OK, keep going but he doesn't have to answer this.

Greg recognises the potential threat of Phillip’s question to Elias so he tries to do ‘damage control’ (Holmes and Marra 2004) in line 20 saying that Elias does not have to respond. He carefully balances attending to both students’ face needs.

Phillip, below, proceeds (lines 25 -28) asking Elias what kind of Palestinian child-rearing values he intends to keep/ discard. He makes it explicit in line 28 that he wants Elias to focus on raising a GIRL. It is curious that he used (and emphasised) the word ‘girl’ instead of ‘daughter’ which can be interpreted as foregrounding a stereotypical assumption that women do not have the same rights as men in Muslim countries.

23 Phil this this question but not, [not asking so]

24 Eli [okay, but yeah]

25 Phil yeah SO, how will you raise your children? so, in other words,

26 what Palestinian values will you throw away? (.)

27 which one will you keep and so how will you handle

28 that situation (.) living in Canada and then raising a GIRL.

Elias answers Phillip's question with another question, accompanied by laughter which I would suggest is his way of softening a confrontational stance while attempting to uncover Phillip's motivation for his line of questioning:

29 Eli but I have one question for you (.) why you ask ask me this question?
 (laughs)

[...]

Line 29 above, 'why you ask ask me this question' indicates that Elias has picked up the implied associations of his being a Muslim with the practice of honour killing. Below, notice how he delayed saying 'as I AM a CRIMINAL' (line 46), mitigated by false starts (lines 34, 36, 43). Elias's line 38 'I'm not anymore your neighbour', although said in a jokey tone is disaffiliative. It should be noted that Elias fondly calls Phillip 'neighbour' because they sit beside each other.

34 Eli but he - you start
35 Phil (laughs)
36 Eli [you start], ok
37 Phil [(laughs)]
38 Eli ok come on Phillip I'm not anymore your neighbour! (in a jokey tone)
39 Phil (laughs)
40 Eli OK, COME ON, Philip!
41 Phil (laughs)
42 Ss (laugh)
43 Eli [(laughs)] but you started you started question your with erm
44 Phil [(laughs)]
45 Eli you started your question you know with a strange strange story
46 that erm as I AM a CRIMINAL!

47 Phil [(laughs)]
 48 Eli [(laughs)] he started his story (addressing the other students),
 49 ok come on, come on
 [...]

Phillip's laughter sequences, above, were puzzling. Was he mocking Elias, trivializing his feelings? Or was his use of laughter a reaction to 'situational awkwardness' (Osvaldsson 2004: 541); or was it nervous laughter? Elias also had his moments of awkward laughter (lines 43, 48) perhaps to lessen the tension and try to claim solidarity with Phillip. Another possible interpretation, particularly in Phillip's case is that laughter might have been used in place of verbal back channels to appeal to friendly relations in spite of problematic talk. Meierkord (1998) indeed found that *lingua franca* speakers of English in her study tend to use laughter as a substitute for back channels to create an atmosphere of friendliness and cooperation.

Below, Elias makes explicit his interpretation of Phillip's implication that he is a criminal like the Afghan father who killed his daughters (lines 60, 61, 63). Then, he presents an identity that clarifies in no uncertain terms that he does not belong to the 'same group of that fellow' (lines 67-69).

60 Eli ok, Philip let let me tell YOU but the way, yeah really the way you
 61 started the introduction that with that crime seems that I am a (laughs)
 62 Phil (laughs)
 63 Eli the [same group of that fellow]
 64 Phil [(laughs)]
 65 Eli but let me tell you, but for me I erm
 66 Phil yeah
 67 Eli I like my daughter very I like girls than boys

68 and (.) that my kids feel jealous how I treat my ONLY daughter, I,

69 I like daughter and just to tell you my kids//

70 Phil // oka::y

[...]

As Elias continues, he addresses the ‘real’ question behind the question (lines 88 to 95 and 97 to 98). He confronts the issue directly about the association that Phillip made between honour killing and Islam, emphasising that killing is ‘AGAINST the rules against the religion any religion, killing is a very, very big crime’ (lines 94, 95).

88 Eli let me just make it clear, and for you, if you are talking about in

89 general that Muslim or Islam or that fellow from Afghanistan

90 it is not with even the religion rules so even if somebody (.)

91 did a mistake a girl or a boy or whoever that it is not a burden for

92 anybody to kill any person. It is just great great things that nobody

93 by the name of RELIGION can do it even if it is is,

94 if she is your daughter or your wife, it is AGAINST the rules against the

95 religion any religion, killing is a very, very big crime, //

96 Phil // yes

97 Eli nobody can say ok is my daughter she's my daughter

98 or my son I can do whatever, NO it is not RELIGION.

After line 98 above, there were further questions about Elias’s childhood in Jordan. When he was finished answering the questions and proceeded to take his usual seat, Phillip pays him a compliment which, considering what has just taken place, seemed misplaced and unexpected:

107 Phil so Elias, your English you speak very good xxx, that's why your

108 speaking is easy to listen.

Two days after the above ‘As I am a criminal’ incident, also in Greg’s class, Phillip asked for permission to speak before the whole group:

4 Phil I need to say something [to the group]
5 Greg [I'm fine with that]
6 Phil one day, I was watching the movie on TV (.) with my wife
7 when she asked me (.) if I DIED today,
8 will you mar - marry another woman? //
9 Ss // (laugh)
10 Phil I say YES (2.0). she was SA::D so, cr::ying,

Phillip admits having hurt Elias's feelings (lines 11-12), apologises (lines 13 to 14) and tells the listeners he didn't mean to hurt Elias's feelings (line 15).

161

12 happened at class (.) I hurt (.) Elias his feelings xxx right?
 13 I apologise in PUBLIC!
 14 yesterday I talked to him (.) just in PRIVATE
 15 I DIDN'T mean to hurt him because (.)
 16 I tell the story just to initiate a debate of about how to raise our children
 17 (.) here because it HURT someone's feelings yesterday,
 18 Phil I apologise, we we had a heart to heart talk between men,
 19 Jink (in a whisper) is he crying? (to Rachana)

Phillip made salient that he had already apologised in private (line 14) and again in public (line 13). It is worthy of analytic interest that he refers to Elias in the third person (his feelings, him, someone) as if he was not there. This may be a negative politeness strategy in the sense of Brown and Levinson (1987) to allow Elias the autonomy to act as he pleases without feeling pressured to offer forgiveness. It may also be a way to elevate the face of the one who was offended. Indeed, as Holmes (1990: 189) claims, serious offenses might require redressive measures that involve a more complex or elaborated linguistic apology.

Phillip, below, emphasises the word 'IN FRONT of the class' in line 20 which perhaps adds to the sincerity of his apology; that he is willing to humble himself in front of the group. In line 21, he announces the happy ending – 'he is my FRIEND.'

20 Phil TODAY I do this I do it again IN FRONT of class!
 21 So, he is my FRIEND. (laughs)
 22 Ss (laugh)

Below, Elias responds to Phillip's apology affectionately calling him 'my neighbour' (line 70):

70 Eli thank you my neighbour (gaze directed at Phillip)
 71 and now just what I want to maybe that time he didn't meant
 72 but erm I want to assure what you said that- the- here
 73 we are like a family that you know that even now we see each other more
 74 than our families and for me my feelings that we'll keep on we started
 75 the good relationship with our leader and our program and our friends
 76 here are looking forward long relationship and hope success to all of you
 77 anytime, anyplace this is my feeling I hope all xxx
 78 so we will be friends for a long time and wish success
 79 to each of us any place, anytime, thank you.

Elias directs lines 70 to 72 to Phillip; the rest of his remarks (lines 73 to 79) to the whole class emphasising family and long-term relationships - two themes that run through the threads of EPPI's expanding common ground. Having the benefit of hindsight, I feel strongly that the interaction between Elias and Phillip might have actually helped in solidifying the foundations of the group's common ground. As Tekleab, Quigley and Tesluk (2009: 170) state, the way conflict is managed can have a positive impact on group unity and may help in fostering a stronger relational identity. Evidence that harmony is important to this group is the way in which Elias and Phillip continue to 'repair' the damage two weeks after the formal public apology has taken place in Greg's class.

Below, the 'neighbours' were assigned to work in pairs to practise interview techniques. Elias greets Phillip with 'ToRAAMba,' Phillip's last name. In Chapter 5, I explain how the repeated use of ToRAAMba evolved into an in-group marker. Elias seems to use Phillip's last name as a term of endearment:

Week 2 WS310021.17.09.09 You're English for me

1 Eli ToRAAMba! [(laughs)]good,

2 Phil [(laughs)]

3 Eli good! ToRAAMba.

Instead of doing the assigned activity, the two men chose to attend to relationship building. Below, Phillip praises Elias for his English speaking skills (lines 24, 30), an extension of redressing the face threat that was committed three days ago. Recall that immediately after their problematic talk 'As I am a criminal,' he gave Elias a compliment for his 'good English'. In Brown and Levinson's terms, Phillip was giving Elias the gift of compliments which not only redresses the face threat from the offensive behavior but also serves as a 'social accelerator' indicating that speaker wants to 'come closer' to the hearer (Brown and Levinson 1987: 103). Holmes (1990: 156) also suggests that offenders may combine different verbal and non-verbal strategies (e.g. sending flowers) to compensate for the offense. She adds that some remedial exchanges can continue for several days, as in the case of Phillip and Elias:

24 Phil you're very comfortable with English ve::RY GOOD.

25 fluent, so hummnnn,

27 Eli yes (.) you think I am perfect // (smiling in a jokey tone)

28 Phil // yeah yeah yes, you're //

29 Eli // but //

30 Phil // you're very good in English !

[...]

46 Phil for ME, you're English man you're English for me.

47 Eli really? (sounds very pleased, smiling) //

48 Phil YES, yes, yes (.)

Above, Elias is amused (lines 27, 47) and responds positively to Phillip's compliments. By praising Elias, Phillip constructs an identity of a 'renewed person, a person who has paid for his sin against the expressive order and is once more to be trusted in the judgmental scene' (Goffman 1969: 16). Elias (line 61, below) proceeds to thank Phillip for the compliments. He also uses 'my friend' and Phillip's last name ToRAAMba affectionately to signal that the crack to the foundations of the common ground has been repaired.

- 61 Eli thank you my friend. (smiles)
 62 Phil [(laughs)]
 63 Eli [(laughs) ToRAAMba! ToRAAMba!]
 [...]

There were four other instances in the corpus where Elias made it explicit before the group that his relationship with Phillip was harmonious; all occurred in the first four weeks of the programme. Due to space limitations, I analyse only two. In the extract below, the class was just discussing that information interviews should not last more than fifteen minutes. Elias offers a humourous comment about keeping track of time:

Week 4 WS310051.28.09.09 My dear neighbour

- 1 Eli I have another idea, so (.) okay,
 2 I can bring my my dear neighbour Phillip ToRAAMba
 3 after five minutes he can (.) he can tell me 'time is over!'
 4 Ss [(laugh) yes, yes!]
 5 Vely [(laughs) good idea, good idea!]
 6 Ss (clap their hands)

The other students seem to approve of how the friendship between the two men has grown (line 4); Velyvet, indeed thought it was a good idea for Elias to bring Phillip

along (line 5). I am not sure how to interpret the applause in line 6 because it seemed superfluous. But looking at it from the point of view of the students and the value they place on harmony and solidarity, Elias's display of fondness for his 'dear neighbour' was perhaps seen as a good enough cause for jubilation. Recall that Elias's and Phillip's 'As I am a criminal' encounter took place two weeks ago. So the other students may be expressing approval that the two men appeared as if they had become 'good neighbours' again.

In the extract below, Phillip was not present in the room because he had to go for an information interview. Elias is worried about him and suggests that they should give him a call to see how he is doing:

Week 4 WS310056.30.09.09 I'm worried about my dear neighbour

- 1 Eli I'm a bit worried about my dear erm neighbour Phillip ToRAAMba
2 why not to let our second neighbour to call him now
3 and to give him this advice.
4 Ss (laugh)
5 Eli why not, yes? my DEAR neighbour,
6 Tom he's fine.
7 Eli no let us call him!
8 Tom I'm I'm sure he's fine.

Elias uses 'my dear neighbour' twice to refer to Phillip. He constructs an identity of a concerned close friend. He insists that 'our second neighbour' (referring to Velyvet) should call Phillip but Tom reassures him that he is fine (lines 6 and 8). The excerpts above took place within two weeks of the conflict talk between Phillip and Elias. Towards the later weeks of the programme, I did not find any more occurrences in the corpus of Elias making explicit comments to the class about his 'dear neighbour.'

I suggest that once the damage to the foundations of common ground had been repaired, there was less need for the two students to display that they were on good terms.

Thus far in this section, I have unpacked a series of interactions between Phillip, a native speaker of Lingala and Elias, a native speaker of Arabic. Both had to use English as a common language to manage and resolve their problematic encounter. Note that both participants only use English for work and educational purposes. They use their native languages to communicate with family members, and close social networks. Although I did not analyse the utterances according to grammatical correctness, it is probably evident in the transcription that they were non-native speakers of English. But non-nativeness or ‘limited’ proficiency did not prevent them from pursuing their communication goals or inferring meaning. Elias was able to recover (and answer) the ‘real’ question although Phillip did not make any explicit associations between Islam and honour killing. Phillip demonstrated his sincerity by apologising privately to Elias in a ‘heart to heart talk between men’ and ‘in front of the class.’ What I wish to emphasise here is that non-native speakers of a language are not ‘at the mercy of grammar and discourse forms for communication’ (Canagarajah 2007: 923). As Elias and Phillip have demonstrated, they are not deficient communicators. They were able to mobilize existing resources – humility, openness to deviations, flexibility, creativity, sensitivity to others, and sense of humour – to jointly make sense of the interaction.

4.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have used ‘common ground’ as an analytic concept derived from the EPPI participants’ perspective and explicit goal of building ‘one team, one family.’ Common ground encompasses overlapping and inextricably linked dimensions: shared knowledge, relational identity, in-group membership, and affective convergence.

These different dimensions of common ground are not pre-given; they are built up through repeated and frequent engagement over time.

The data extracts from this chapter were taken from classroom interactions that took place in the first four weeks or the beginning phase of the EPPI team/family. I showed the initial laying of the foundations of common ground through the ‘cooking class’ speech by Tom and the ‘more than a team’ welcome address by Elias. While Tom expressed his desire to see the class become a team, Elias stated that the EPPI group was more than a team; it was a family.

Although the official goal of the EPPI programme was to help prepare immigrants for employment in Canada, it became evident that alongside this objective is the promotion of solidarity and rapport amongst the students. In the first two weeks of the classroom phase, the students started to collectively build a shared repertoire of personal narratives. The session on ‘Dealing with Grief from Loss’ provided them with a space to discuss their experience of leaving their homelands. Through the Lifecycle presentations, they revealed aspects of their identity as well as their values and beliefs. The cooking class afforded them an opportunity to work together as a team.

The two teachers, Tom and Greg, had to exert conscious efforts at constructing a ‘Filipino identity-by-association’ to negotiate grounds for solidarity and support. They used their personal and close relationships with Filipinos as a resource for claiming in-group membership. Their moments of self-disclosure were interwoven with anecdotes about a Filipino wife (for Tom) and a Filipino caregiver (for Greg). In invoking a ‘Filipino identity-by association,’ Tom and Greg paved the way for contesting common ground that rests solely on national and ethnic membership.

Giving approval/compliments as way to lay the foundations of common ground was a strategy used by the teachers more than the students. This is probably not

surprising considering the institutional nature of the interaction. Beyond what can be captured in an IRF/E pedagogic model, the data showed that Greg gave compliments of a personal nature with elements of self-disclosure; Tom used compliments to enhance the positive face of the students and therefore have team-creating functions.

The 'As I am a criminal' interaction between Elias and Phillip drew our attention to the fragile quality of a team/family that was just starting to form. In spite of the face threats arising out of the insinuations regarding honour killing, both students resolved their differences in front of the whole group over a series of interactions. It can be argued therefore that the way in which Phillip and Elias managed their conflict contributed positively to the group's relational identity (see Lee 2006: 19). A similar point was made by Wenger (1998: 78) who notes that disagreement can be a productive part of a CofP.

By exerting a concerted effort to repair cracks to the growing common ground, Elias and Phillip demonstrated that interethnic differences (in the sense of Gumperz) were not always salient in the ongoing interaction. Using English as a common language, Elias (native speaker of Arabic) and Phillip (native speaker of Lingala) showed that they could draw from their existing 'attitudinal resources' (Canagarajah 2006: 205) to repair relational damage. I suggest that this was quite an achievement for speakers who did not have the benefit of shared communicative conventions or culturally learnt norms to guide them. Having come from different CofPs and cultural backgrounds, and being non-native speakers of the language they were using to repair the damage, both Elias and Phillip would have had to constantly monitor their own talk and each other's while at the same time attempting to make sure that no further interpersonal damage was created. The management of their problematic talk required the agility, versatility and readiness for the 'impromptu fabrication of forms and

conventions to establish alignment in each situation of communication' (Canagarajah 2007: 932). Contrary to the common belief that individuals who come from dissimilar cultural and linguistic backgrounds only have a limited pool of resources to draw from, Phillip and Elias demonstrated that they can activate the resources they brought along and merge those with the resources brought about to achieve the goals of the interaction.

'Team' and 'family' were images that the participants used to create a common vision of their group. If we take the stance that metaphors structure our thoughts and influence the way reality is perceived (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), then we will have to assume too that the EPPI participants will carry with them different ways of behaving, thinking and organising their lived realities. But as the story of the EPPI class unfolds in the next chapter, we learn that metaphors, just like knowledge, identity, in-group membership and affective convergence are subject to negotiation. What should not take a back seat when we explore the EPPI group's interactions is that the students conduct these negotiations in a language they did not learn from childhood or normally use at home with their close relations. In the next chapter, I explore how the students and teachers of the EPPI maintain common ground.

CHAPTER FIVE

MAINTAINING COMMON GROUND: WORKING TOGETHER, HAND IN HAND

I grow up from September to now. I learn a lot from you guys. [...] so this is one of the spiritual law, team player. You should work together, hand in hand, to reach your goal. If it's just one of you is working is doing bad, all team all goal will not be reached.

Phillip, research participant

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Using extracts from the first four weeks of the programme, I showed in Chapter 4 how the EPPI participants used language to lay the foundations of their ‘one team, one family.’ This chapter explores data from the fifth week to the last day of the 12-week programme. Its aim is to analyse how the EPPI participants’ mutual engagement and regular interactions over time produced shared practices which further sustained common ground. It seeks to show that ‘the management of common ground is directly implicated in our perpetual attendance to managing personal relationships within our social networks’ (Enfield 2008: 235).

It seems artificial to carve out specific moments in the life history of a group, pick out and analyse each section according to superimposed analytic categories such as ‘laying the foundations’ or ‘maintaining common ground.’ It is impossible to say when ‘laying the foundations’ stops and maintenance work starts. Speakers may use the same utterance for different purposes. It is thus inevitable when examining natural speech data to make room for ambiguity and overlapping functions. As Holmes (2006: 76) states, ‘people are very skilled in exploiting the multifunctional aspects of human communication systems, including language: one utterance typically serves several functions’. However it can be argued that the interactional work individuals perform in

the beginning of a relationship differs from the work they do once the relationship has progressed from distant to close (Maynard and Zimmerman 1984). Although the development of a distant-close relationship cannot be expected to map on precisely to calendar time, a distinction between temporal dimensions is necessary to focus the analytic lens. Thus while Chapter 4 showed the beginning phase of mutual engagement, Chapter 5 shows how, as a result of mutual engagement in a joint endeavour to be a team/family, shared practices emerged including ‘ways of doing things, ways of talking’ (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992).

The rest of the chapter is divided into six sections. Section 5.2 argues that common ground is not flat but with varying layers of depth and breadth. Section 5.3 draws from Wenger’s (1998) indicators of CofP and answers the question, ‘how do we know when common ground is being made manifest’? Section 5.4 examines data extracts that show the students and teachers of the EPPI solidify the common ground they built up in the first few weeks of the programme. Section 5.5 shows that shared ways of talking and doing things have been negotiated so that members can use shared linguistic repertoire to further strengthen common ground. Section 5.6 is a continuation of the ‘long conversation’ (Maybin 1994; Lillis 2008) that Elias and Tom started in Chapter 4. Section 5.7 summarises the chapter and highlights the key strategies and resources that participants use to maintain common ground.

5.2. LEVELS OF COMMON GROUND

In the previous chapter I discussed that *established* common ground is a result of interaction, *assumed* common ground emerges by virtue of membership in a similar community and *as though* common ground refers to new information (beliefs, knowledge) that speakers invoke *as though* it is already part of common ground (Lee 2001). From these categories of common ground it can be assumed that there will be

many levels of intersection where what is shared will be shaped by different permutations. As the examples in subsequent sections in this chapter illustrate, common ground within the EPPI group is neither flat nor fixed. There seem to be pockets of common ground whose scope is shaped by individual's attributes that pre-existed their membership in the group. For example, Faisal and Elias are both Muslims so they have other layers of *assumed* and *as though* common ground as a communicative resource. On Friday afternoons for twelve weeks, they went together to the multi-faith prayer room at the college. In the corpus, there are short conversations between the two students talking about the Quran. Harleen and Jinky both have small children so they have this shared identity layered on to the group identity that gives their common ground a different configuration. Rachana and Velyvet both worked in finance-related occupations before moving to Canada. This aspect of their common ground shows up during lunchtime chats where they engage in playful debates about investments. Phillip and Velyvet have French as a common linguistic ground so they chat to each other in French during coffee breaks. Common ground between students also differs in breadth and depth in comparison with common ground between students and teachers. Since the students socialize outside of the classroom hours they share information, opinions and beliefs that they may not readily share when teachers are present. The point I want to suggest here is that common ground is instantiated in different ways as shaped by the interacting parties, and whether the interaction is during whole group discussions, at lunch hours or as pockets of side conversations while other activities are going on. The illustration below is one way to conceptualize common ground in the group. While there are areas that members share as a whole, there are specific areas that they may only share with specific members of the team. Specific aspects of what is 'common' in common ground may be made salient at different points of the interaction. As Wenger

(1998: 78-79) points out, mutual engagement does not entail homogeneity. Members may share the same goals and wants but their individual circumstances vary so that their responses to situations reflect this variation (see Figure 10).

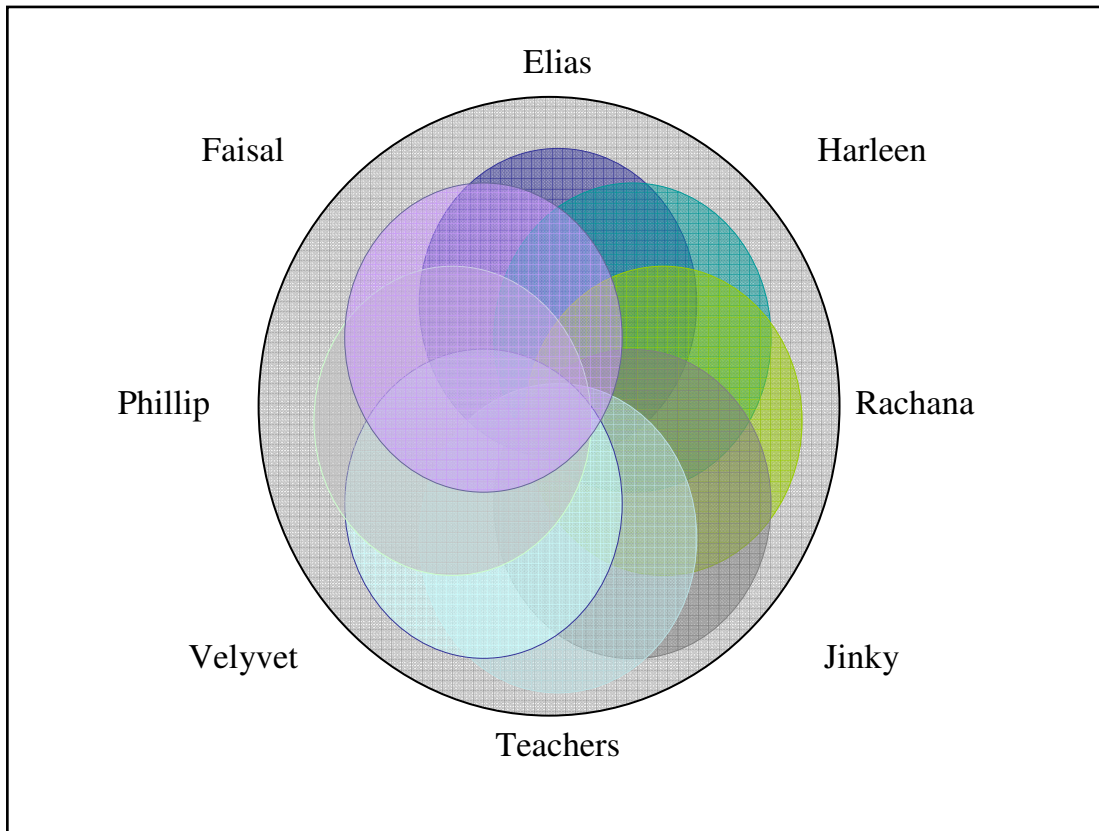


Figure 10 Layers of Common Ground

5.3 INSTANTIATIONS OF COMMON GROUND

The EPPI group that I observed is the eleventh of EPPI classes that the College of Western Canada has run. Each EPPI group is similar to the others in many ways – the teachers, location, syllabus, and textbooks. But each EPPI group is unique because the members are unique; the interactions are influenced by the complex interplay between social actors and context. Wenger's (1998: 125-126) indicators of CofP as instantiations of common ground are helpful in differentiating this 11th EPPI class from the ten

previous EPPI classes. These instantiations are more evident in this chapter than in Chapter 4; it is the frequent interactions, over time, that give rise to these practices:

1. a shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world
2. local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
3. jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
4. absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
5. shared ways of engaging in doing things together
6. the rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
7. very quick setup of a problem to be discussed
8. substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs
9. knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
10. sustained mutual relationships - harmonious or conflictual
11. certain styles recognised as displaying membership
12. mutually defining identities
13. the ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
14. specific tools, representations, and other artifacts

The first seven items on the list seem to be the most relevant in this study with their focus on the linguistic realizations of common ground. They lend themselves to observation over a limited period of time. The last seven of Wenger's indicators may be more readily observable in workplace CofPs. As I have observed with my participants, sustained engagement has influenced their ways of talking and ways of negotiating meaning. Shortcuts to communication, absence of introductory preambles, inside jokes

and knowing laughter became part of the shared repertoire. Stories and anecdotes were recycled in future conversations serving as a resource for widening common ground. These observations resonate with Cutting's (1999; 2000) findings which show that individuals who interact frequently overtime, develop their own particular in-group code or an economical way of referring to persons, objects and events. Cutting's participants were all native speakers of English. As their interpersonal knowledge about each other grew, their language became more implicit and more informal characterized by ellipsis, slang and expletives. I will provide evidence that illustrates how my participants, all non-native speakers of English use their available resources to create their own in-group codes that are opaque to outsiders.

5.4 SOLIDIFYING THE BUILDING BLOCKS

5.4.1 Shared Experience: Stories and Salient Identities

It has been claimed that every aspect of one's multiple identities can be deployed as an interactional resource although at any given time only particular aspects of this social identity (e.g. gender, ethnicity, power, institutional authority) may be given prominence (Holmes 2005: 674). But why make salient a particular identity over another in specific contexts? Abrams, O'Connor and Giles (2002) posit that it may be partly explained by the Communication Accommodation theory (see Giles 1973; Giles, Coupland and Coupland 1991) – speakers may move towards or away from the addressees depending on how much closeness or distance they wish to have with them. I argue that it is more complex than that; while we have multiple identities that we can activate during an interaction, we do not pull them out of a hat and be whoever we want to be. Some identities can be invoked more plausibly than others. For example, if I wanted to show convergence towards a group of mothers with young children and I do

not have children, I cannot just invoke a mother identity without being perceived as insincere. So, I may resort to the next best thing which is my ‘auntie’ identity or I may talk about the experiences of friends who have children. One of the recurring themes for Tom and Greg, as we have seen in Chapter 4 has been their appeal to a ‘Filipino identity-by-association’. They continue to sustain this identity throughout the twelve weeks of the programme. But unlike in Chapter 4 where there were explicit references to Tom’s wife and Greg’s caregivers as being Filipinos, this information became treated as taken for granted towards the second half of the programme. I show only one example below which was an aside – the students were doing written work when Greg engaged in a quick chat with Jinky:

Week 6 WS310091.12.10.09 Mahal kita ((I love you))

- 37 Greg how about how about it's it's MA (.) ha::l (.) ki::ta, ((I love you)) //
- 38 Jink // [MaHAL kita!] (corrects Greg’s pronunciation)
- 39 Mab [hmmmmnn]
- 40 Greg Maha::l din kita. // ((I love you too))
- 41 Jink // MaHAL!
- 42 Mab oh, she's teaching you all the nice things too!
- 43 Jink MaHAL! (.) but it could be also that your your shirt is MAHAL.
- 44 (.) like *mahal ang damit mo, mahal ang damit mo!*
 ((your shirt is expensive, your shirt is expensive))
- 45 Greg *mahal?* //
- 46 Jink // yes!
- 47 Greg so that's what I said (xxx) *maHAL* //
- 48 Jink // *maHal* is pricey or it could be LOVE!
- 46 Greg so two words can mean two things because of how you

47 pronounce it? //

[...]

Above, Greg assumes a Filipino language learner identity (line 37) which was ratified by Jinky (line 38) who positions herself as a language teacher. Jinky corrects Greg's pronunciation three times (lines 38, 41, 43) and gives him another definition of the word *mahal* (lines 43 to 44). In line 42 when I said '*she's* teaching you all the nice things too', I was referring to Greg's Filipino caregiver. Everybody knew who *she* was because it became common knowledge in the first week of the class. Greg's invocation of an identity as a second language learner allows him to sustain in-group membership and shared identity. By assuming the less powerful language learner role, Greg downplays his institutional authority as teacher; Jinky, on the other hand, by positioning herself as a *Tagalog* expert inverts the power relations temporarily. Aston (1993: 239) suggests that the momentary inversion of non-native speaker/native speaker roles creates a space for interlocutors to achieve affective convergence. As a learner of *Tagalog*, Greg conveys the message to the students that he knows the difficulties involved with language learning. He also provides a window onto his relationship with his Filipina caregiver – the fact that he is continually learning new *Tagalog* words from her suggests that he has an informal, familiar and familial relationship with her, thus giving an identity of a benevolent, 'culturally-sensitive' employer.

The next extract was taken in the seventh week of the programme. It shows students trying to create distance between themselves and their national cultures which may have implications for sustaining common ground. As Aston (1993: 237) maintains, if participants foreground identities as representatives of their own national cultures, it may be harder for them to maintain a group identity. Here are extracts from a lunchtime conversation with Jinky, Velyvet, Harleen and Rachana:

133 Jink if if Velyvet for example or Rachana
134 is a Filipina I would not be very open erm
135 I would not easily be very open unlike Mabel,
136 it depends, it depends on the person like if //
137 Vely // it's true erm
138 Jink for example in the case of Mabel with her also
139 it's different it's different because the the way we met
140 she she introduced herself to me she is, unlike
141 the other Filipinos you would feel awkward, you're being
142 *yung parang pinag-aaralan* ka (2.0) (gaze turned to Mabel)
(you're being judged/assessed))
143 you're being judged!
[...]
162 it's also true for Filipinos so when you're dealing
163 with the same culture usually (.) like in my case
164 I would be very cautious as to what information
165 I could share as to what I wanted to share //
166 Vely // that's true.
167 Jink because you never know (.) [they can spill out like]
159 Mab [I see]
160 Jink they can make something out of you,

179

interest as Jinky code-switched from English to *Tagalog*, our shared language (*yung parang pinag-aaralan ka*) with her gaze turned towards me. The code-switch was not meant to exclude the other students; as she offers a translation in line 143 (you're being judged). I view the *Tagalog* code-switch as face mitigation ensuring that I was not offended when she said that the presence of other Filipinos would cause her to feel awkward (line 141) and less open (line 134). This interpretation is confirmed when Jinky explicitly says that 'in the case of Mabel' (line 138), 'it's different because...' (lines 139 to 140). Velyvet shows affective convergence with Jinky (in the sense of Aston 1993) in lines 137 and 166, indicating they share the same assumptions and perspectives. As Jinky continues to share her feelings, Velyvet again demonstrates empathy and support (lines 263 and 265).

- 258 Jink the Ilocano association and whatever but (.) I prefer
 259 not to be a member of them too because of that reason
 260 that I - the more the more erm you will be
 261 the more Filipinos (.) y-you will be encountering with,
 262 the MORE it will be erm prob-problematic I think //
 263 Vely // difficult to
 264 Jink [difficult, yes]
 265 Vely [deal with them,] yes

The 'Ilocano association' that Jinky refers to in line 258 pertains to an ethnolinguistic group of Filipinos who originate from the northern part of the Philippines. As the extracts above show, Jinky emphatically distances herself from other Filipinos (lines 261 to 262). Velyvet shows involvement and support with Jinky by completing and co-constructing her utterances (lines 263 and 265). Jinky, in line 64, agrees with Velyvet's co-construction. There is obvious alignment as both participants

ended their utterances with the word 'yes' (Jinky in line 264 and Velyvet in line 265). It can be argued that their talk is a discursive accomplishment of being 'team' where there is affective convergence and rhythmical sharing.

It has been claimed that individuals may enhance their self-esteem by presenting a positive group identity of their ethnic affiliation (Ylänne 2008: 174). However, this does not seem to be the case with Jinky as shown above, and neither is it with Rachana. She becomes critical of other Indians (line 302):

301 Rach // and one more thing I don't want to SAY the NAME, actually,
302 like they came from India, like well settled but but
303 good bank balance and everything like when they
304 when we came, we make - like we we don't have any
305 let's say support from my parents, //

306 Mab // uhum

307 Rach like money or financial this thing so we came with a lot of
308 struggle after - like like we, what do you say (.)
309 based on (.) we we - lot of efforts because it is the FUTURE.

310 Mab ye::ah

311 Rach xxx like in my family, like why you planned we can xxx also
312 like why you want to go to Canada like EVERY one,
313 they were saying only NEGATIVE points.

[...]

360 Rach they used to say whenever they see us why you didn't
361 buy this thing you didn't buy this thing why you are doing this job,
362 do you (xxx) physically, you are not well? all those questions
363 come, - it makes me feel (.) why these people are asking like this?

Rachana constructs an identity of a struggling newcomer who immigrated to Canada, in spite of criticisms from other Indians she knew (lines 301 – 303) and discouragement from her family (lines 311 -313). She feels looked down upon because of her lower social status in Canada compared to what she left behind in India (lines 360-363). It will be recalled that Rachana and her husband used to work as financial adviser and university professor, respectively in India (see Section 3.4.2.4). At the time of data collection, both were working part-time as customer service clerks in a food store.

Rachana's narratives extend Jinky's initial self-disclosure about not wanting to associate with other Filipinos. She uses solidary and supportive language (Aston 1988; 1993) to solidify their common ground. While in Chapter 4, self-disclosure has the texture of 'this is who I am', self-revelations in the later weeks of the programme convey the message 'we are the same sets of persons.' Harleen shares similar experiences of her first year in Canada:

355 Harl like when I came here for the first year

356 I don't have any furniture,

357 Mab uhum

358 Harl no bed, no NOTHING (.)

Harleen's self-disclosure exemplifies affective convergence and in-group membership. Although it encompasses the dimension of common ground as knowledge, it functions as a supportive and solidarity-sustaining utterance. Indeed 'telling stories in rounds' instantiates high involvement (Tannen 2005: 40) and at the same time promotes further increments to common ground.

Below, Rachana continues to talk about her frustrations with other Indians while Harleen (lines 370 and 372) and Velyvet (lines 368 and 371) maintain affiliation

through the use of supportive language which instantiates personal involvement and a relationship of ‘caring and knowing’ (Aston 1988; 1993). Because of the shared biography built up as resource in the formative weeks, they can easily draw upon this repertoire to solidify the building blocks of their common ground. As Rachana continues, Harleen and Velyvet jointly give her advice:

367 Rach I don't xxx because they feel - makes me feel BAD

368 Vely why?

369 Ss (multi-party overlaps)

370 Harl just ignore these[kinds of]

371 Vely [ignore them!]

372 Harl // I ignore them.

The repetition of each other’s words (lines 370-372) and speech overlap between Harleen and Velyvet can be viewed as a discursive enactment of a team/family and a form of affective convergence and involvement. Furthermore, unmitigated, bald on-record advice (ignore them) to Rachana indicate that common ground is well in place. I return to advice-giving as an emergent shared practice in Section 5.5.4.

The four EPPI participants supported one another’s point of view indicating a desire to ‘uphold a commonly created view of the world (Scollon and Scollon 2001: 47) or a ‘genuine fellow-feeling in the bosom’ in Aston’s (1988: 99) terms. Sharing their personal experiences also indicates high involvement (Tannen 2005). What interactional benefit do they get out of speaking negatively about their compatriots? Aston (1993: 237) purports that the creation of common ground between individuals from different ethnic or national cultures may entail that they ‘turn from their identities as representative members of their cultures of origin to focus on their identities as individuals.’ One way to do this, he adds, is by expressing critical or ironic attitudes

towards ones' culture of origin. Thus as Harleen, Rachana, Jinky and Velyvet distance themselves from the stereotypes of their culture, they create a kind of 'heterotopia' defined here as 'intensely affective spaces that redefine the experiential feeling of being and becoming and provide their members with a different communal feeling' (Zembylas and Ferreira 2009: 5). In other words, they have used culture as a resource; they turned the liminal space between cultures as a common ground that they have discursively made manifest.

5.4.2 Shared Stories: Small Talk in Unofficial Space

As stated earlier, the students attended computer classes three afternoons a week. Since they already had some computer experience, the class was set up so that they could work independently at their own pace. As there were no teacher-led lessons in the class, the main task for Kate, the computer instructor, was to help students if they were having any problems. In the first three weeks of the computer class, Kate interacted with students on a one to one basis while explaining something on the computer. In the fourth week, she started to engage in small 'unofficial' talk (Swann 2007) with the whole class; by 'unofficial' I refer to stretches of talk that students and teacher engaged in that were not to do with the computer tasks as set in the curriculum. Examples of such talk which became part of the shared repertoire were: surviving and driving in winter, Thanksgiving day, Halloween, H1N1 flu virus, spirituality, looking for a new apartment, buying a new couch, being invited for dinner, preventing a cold, homeopathic medicine, getting old in Canada, trade occupations and salaries, accents and languages, joking across cultures, hobbies and food. The unofficial talk in the computer class would go on for a few minutes, then silence, then a new topic would be taken up or a previous theme further developed. The whole time, the students would be working on their computers; participation in the on-going talk was voluntary.

The extract below, taken in week 7, is typical of the intimate unofficial talk in the class. Kate shares a personal anecdote without any ‘introductory preamble’ indicating that the activity is ‘merely the continuation of an ongoing process’ (Wenger 1998: 125).

Week 7 WS310096.23.10.09 In labour

- 1 Kate TWENTY SIX years ago today, I was in labour with my first child
2 Eli whooo oh oh oh,
3 Mab (laughs at Elias's reaction)
4 Eli re::ally?

In line 1, Kate’s initial words, ‘TWENTY SIX’ were said louder than the surrounding discourse because she was trying to get the attention of the students who were working on their computers. Kate could have said, ‘today is my daughter’s birthday’ which is personal but neutral. But instead, she began by saying ‘Twenty six years ago today, I was in labour with my first child...’ to which Elias responds with an amused but embarrassed ‘whooo oh oh oh’ (line 2). Kate’s choice of topic and the ease with which she puts it on the floor enacts familiarity and intimacy telling us that common ground is being enacted. More than that, it is an invitation for involvement which Faisal, Harleen and Phillip willingly accept:

- 5 Fai how many child you have?
6 Kate I have two.
7 Fai boy and girl?//
8 Kate // no, two girls
9 Fai how, they're studying? somewhere? //
10 Kate // no, they're working.
11 Harl one is twenty-three- now?
12 Kate the one, today is twenty- six.

13 Phil yes.

14 Kate and my baby is twenty-four.

[...]

Kate's talk about her daughter's birthday indicates that the nature of the common ground she shared with the students before did not include knowledge of family and personal life. Faisal's ensuing questions for Kate on number of children (line 5), their gender (line 7) and education (line 9) will prove to be starting points for increasing common ground. As Faisal extends the topic below, he makes salient the difference between the Canadian culture and the Bangladeshi culture. In line 25, he just says 'in our country' without mentioning Bangladesh which is a taken for granted information; it need not be spelled out because it is common knowledge. Kate signals her involvement and alignment to the extension of the topic in line 26, 'yeah you have them until they are married'.

22 Fai // Canadian culture is if the girl is 18 years the parents

23 doesn't have responsibility for their children

24 S (laughs)

25 Fai in our country is ABSOLUTELY different!

26 Kate yeah you have them until they're married?

In answering Kate's question above, notice below how Faisal and Elias jointly do the telling:

27 Fai no erm erm if it's a daughter until marriage the parents [have to care her]

28 Eli [or even AFTER.]

29 Fai huh - even after, even after even AFTER! //

30 Eli // forever yeah, //

31 Fai // forerever (laughs)

32 yeah yeah FOREVER yeah till they died.

[...]

Lines 27 to 32 above enact the close relationship between Faisal and Elias. The cooperative overlap (line 28), latching (line 29 to 30) and lexical repetition (lines 28 and 29, lines 30, 31, 32) suggest that they are drawing from the same pool of knowledge. With his display of familiarity with the Bangladeshi culture, Elias evokes and makes visible a special bond with Faisal. As Nofsinger (1991: 163) suggests ‘only a storyteller with some confidence about another person’s private thoughts - and confidence that the other will accept the teller’s version of those thoughts - would be likely to claim such intimate knowledge’. As mentioned earlier, Faisal and Elias pray together on Friday afternoons in the multi-faith room in the college. Their common ground as fellow Muslims may have enabled them to invoke *assumed* and *as though* common ground more easily (Lee 2001).

In the same computer session, the ‘unofficial talk’ progressed from the birth of Kate’s daughter to child-rearing differences between Canada and Bangladesh to other topics such as top-earning jobs and whether or not it would be appropriate to discuss salaries with friends. The atmosphere in the class resembled a group of intimate friends involved in another activity such as knitting or fishing. They did not need to talk to each other to complete their individual tasks but the fact that they chose to indicates their desire for social connection, involvement and maintaining common ground.

5.4.3 Humour: Sustained Harmonious Relationship

In Section 4.4.2, Tom explained that teasing meant liking, affection and acceptance. He used teasing to enact and maintain common ground, entertain the students and to create a light hearted atmosphere in the classroom. Tom knows that the students get very nervous about written tests so he uses this knowledge to tease them.

Week 6 WS310069.06.10.09 Just say ‘yes’!

1 Tom you guys ready for a test? (.) say YES.
2 are you ready for a test?
3 Phil [yes!]
4 Jink [yeah.]
5 Fai [no.] no!
6 Tom I didn't hear it //,
7 Fai // no.
8 Tom are you ready for a test say YES!
9 Jink (to Faisal) we have to say 'yes!'
10 Fai no (laughs)
11 Ss (laugh) (overlapping speech)
12 Tom are you ready for a test (in a louder voice) say YES!
13 Jink Oh yesss!
14 Tom xxx just say YES!
15 Ss (laugh) (overlapping speech)
16 Jink (to Faisal) we have to say [yes (giggles)]
17 Vely [uhumm]
18 Tom boys, boys, are you ready for a test?
19 just say yes!
20 Ss [yes!]
21 Fai [no!]
22 Jink say YES.

Tom, in line 1, creates a play frame signalled by the informal 'you guys' and 'say YES.' Faisal participates in the play by saying 'no' repeatedly (lines 5, 7, 10, 21) in

spite of Jinky's pleas to 'say yes' (lines 9, 22). His 'disagreement' may seem uncooperative on the surface but he is in fact taking full part in the play frame that Tom has set up, thus a solidarity device. Tom's line 19 'boys, boys' is uttered in a teasing and seemingly affectionate manner. As Habib (2008: 1141) argues, 'disagreement and teasing seem to function as a rapport and binding tool among close friends who have already established initial bonds'. Tom seems amused and in the next few lines below, he does a 'personal-centre switch' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 119) which means speaking as if he were a student. The switch is signalled by the plural form of the personal pronoun 'we':

- 32 Tom we're not gonna say – we're not gonna tell a lie! we are not
 33 ready for a test so we're not gonna say yes no matter
 34 what you make us do (in a humourous tone).
 35 no matter what! (laughs) okay,

Below is another example of Tom's 'exam scare' humour, capitalising on his knowledge of the students' dread of written examinations. With a poker face, Tom walks into the room, reaches for sheets of paper from the shelf and proceeds to hand out the 'exam' papers to the students:

Week 12 WS3100181.25.11.09 Scary exam

- 19 Tom ok, let's look at this exam (2.0) (holding sheets of paper)
 20 Phil w-we we're having an exam?
 21 Tom no! [(laughs)]
 22 Ss [(laugh)]
 23 Tom I just keep it in there,
 24 Ss [(laugh)]
 25 T [I just keep this] in there for emergencies (laughs).

- 26 Ss (laugh)
- 27 S but Rachana is //
- 28 Phil // final exam, a::h (.) scary!
- 29 Ss (multi-party talk/laughter)
- 29 Tom no no one would be that cruel
- 30 Ss [(laugh)]
- 31 Tom [to give you your final exam]. nobody! (in a jokey tone)
- 32 Phil all exam is always, always, ALWAYS SCARY.

The extract above shows the group at play, in action. The laughter, not the topic of the tease itself, becomes the focus of the joint activity where everybody takes part. Indeed the very act of laughing together becomes an enactment of intimate moments (Pomerantz and Mandelbaum 2005) which reinforces affective convergence.

The example below shows Tom performing a variety of functions that help sustain common ground. He gives compliments/approval to convey admiration, uses humour to make the students feel relaxed and teases them to express liking and affection.

Week 9 WS310069.06.10.09 They're awesome

- 1 Tom good morning everybody again thanks for making it back on time,
- 2 I'm really impressed, after what I told you before break (.)
- 3 we're gonna work on writing and you STILL make it back on time!
- 4 [(laughs)]
- 5 Ss [(laugh)]
- 6 Tom (laughs) that's really impressive, it's really - when you think about it
- 7 that's like (laughs) when you think about that, that's pretty amazing
- 8 when you think about it (laughs) it's like I promise to BORE you to
- 9 death (laughs) for the next hour and a half but we're still gonna

5.5 SHARED PRACTICES DEVELOPED OVER TIME

5.5.1 Shared Ways of Talking and In-Group Identity Markers

Inside jokes accompanied by knowing laughter, specialized jargon, shortcuts in referring to things or events and shared discourse that reflect common ground are said to be indicators of a CofP (Wenger 1998). I show a brief utterance below which took place in the fifth week of the EPPI programme which grew into an in-group identity marker over time. The episode below happened before the start of the classes while students were just starting to arrive. I did not have my digital recorder switched on but have written the following in my observation notes. It was the first occurrence of similar utterances that constitute the students' shared linguistic repertoire:

Vely: Hello my name is Rachana ToRAAMba. I am from Manila, Canada.

Ss: (laugh)

Above, it is actually Velyvet, not Rachana talking. ToRAAMba is not Rachana's nor Velyvet's last name but Phillip's. Manila is in the Philippines not in Canada. Velyvet has playfully combined Rachana's first name, Phillip's last name and Jinky's hometown to produce a humorous utterance signalling the emerging group identity. The utterance also reflects the EPPI students' shared biography. On day one of the class, the students had to introduce themselves to the three teachers and each time, Rachana was asked to speak louder. Velyvet's playful combining of names and place of origin calls up memories of the first week of class when students were still strangers to each other. There were many instances in the corpus showing students saying 'hello, my name is..., I'm from...' as a form of greeting or tease, usually followed by a knowing laughter. Indeed, it was the 'knowing laughter' response of the students that classifies the name combining utterance (hello my name is...I'm from...) as an in-group identity

marker. The hilarity of the utterance, opaque to an outsider, is very much an in-house shorthand which invokes associations of the first day of the class together.

Notice that in Velyvet's utterance above, his pronunciation of Phillip's last name Toramba, is emphasised in the second syllable so it sounds like ToRAAMba. 'ToRAAMba' as an in-group identity marker is loaded with shared history. Phillip's last name evokes memories of the first day of class: when the students were formally introducing themselves for the first time in Tom's class, Phillip pronounced his name in such a way that the middle syllable (To-RAAM-ba) came out emphatically. As he was saying his last name, his head tilted very slightly from side to side. Tom, who made note of the accompanying head movement repeated Phillip's last name, Toramba, several times complete with the head bobble. The other students followed suit, all of them chanting 'ToRAAMba' while exaggeratedly shaking their heads from side to side and laughing. Since that day, ToRAAMba has become the participants' 'term of endearment' for Phillip. It has evolved over time into a 'tying' device (Maynard and Zimmerman 1984: 303) that links an utterance with a distant discourse context both spatially and temporally. I showed in the previous chapter how Elias used ToRAAMba to build rapport and 'do' camaraderie with Phillip (Section 4.5.2, 'You're English for me').

The next episode below took place in the fifth week of the programme, in Kate's computer class. Rachana and Velyvet are working together on a computer task; the other students are working on their own. Velyvet asks Rachana a 'what-question' which is overheard by Jinky who is sitting nearby:

Week 5 WS310083.09.10.09 What?

1 Vely what? (to Rachana)

2 Jink wha::t? //

- 3 Fai // [w~~ha~~::t?]
- 4 Ss [(laugh)]
- 5 Mab Velyvet! (laughs)
- 6 Fai Velyvet! (laughs) Velyvet says somebody WHA::T? (laughs)

Like the previously discussed in-group markers of name combining and ToRAAMba, the humour in the ‘what’ extract is obscure to someone who does not share the group’s accumulated history. Knowledge of the team’s shared biography is required to unlock the intended meaning and function of ‘what’. As Richards (2006: 12) claims, ‘[a]lthough talk is shaped in the moment, it is not of the moment; its bedrock is laid down over countless exchanges and the judgements that inform its micro-interactional realisation draw on profound reserves of experience and understanding’.

The in-group identity marker ‘what’ acquired its in-house shorthand status after a role play interview in Tom’s class in week 4 of the programme. Velyvet played the job applicant and Tom, the employer. During that role play, Tom asked a question which was misheard by Velyvet so he asked ‘what’. At the feedback session afterwards, it was suggested that Velyvet should not ask employers a direct, unmitigated ‘what’ because it sounded impolite. Since that day, the other students often teased him with ‘what’ pronounced with an exaggerated rising intonation. At lunchtime conversations, it worked like what I would call a ‘voice domino’. This means that when one student, in conversation with Velyvet, asks ‘what’ the other students would take it up as a cue and there would be several echoes of ‘what’ followed by laughter.

Another commonly heard in-group identity marker is the phrase ‘you understand.’ From the same computer session as the above ‘what’ extract, Jinky turns around and teases Faisal who becomes the subject of group ribbing after Velyvet:

Week 5 WS310083.09.10.09 You understand?

- 7 Jink you understand? (mocking Faisal in a friendly way)
- 8 All (spontaneous loud laughter, Kate included)
- 9 Vely that's a good one! (laughs)
- 9 Rach you understand? (laughs) (addressing Velyvet)

While ‘what’ was the group tease for Velyvet, ‘you understand’ was for Faisal. ‘You understand’ was Faisal’s favorite tag question which he used in the same way as one might use ‘you know what I mean’. As told to me by Jinky right after the computer class, the other students found it annoying when Faisal used ‘you understand’ to ask for confirmation. She said that Canadian co-workers might find his use of ‘you understand’ as condescending and demeaning. Thus, the tease was intended to help Faisal improve his communication skills by giving him feedback in a non-hurtful manner. ‘What’ and ‘you understand’ followed by ‘knowing’ laughter are two of the markers that index the members’ history of mutual engagement. As part of the shared repertoire, these in-group markers define membership and identities in not so subtle ways so that ‘if you don’t get it, you’re not one of them’.

The four in-group markers - name combining (my name is...), ToRAAMba, ‘what’ and ‘you understand’ formed the core of the EPPI students’ multifunctional linguistic repertoire. They were deployed as resources for giving indirect feedback, claiming common ground, maintaining rapport and humour. They performed a cohesive function because in leaving out a lot of the contextual information, the listeners are forced to search for the *established* common ground to fill in the details. Therefore, meaning is jointly and interactively achieved. The in-group markers can also be viewed as indication of a developing relational identity instantiated by ‘symbolic convergence’

defined here as the process whereby participants start to share ‘symbolic norms that they can use to talk about areas of commonality’ (Cupach and Imahori 1993: 126).

According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 110-111), speakers claim common ground through the use of in-group language such as code-switching, jargon or slang, contraction and ellipsis. It is assumed therefore that these devices are mutually accessible and meaningful to interlocutors, for example slang expressions or the switched language code. For the EPPI students, code switching into another language is obviously not an easy option. Using jargon or slang is also not a readily available resource for the students; they may even avoid using such to avoid misunderstanding. Using expletives as an indicator of growing common ground and informality (Cutting 2000) may be more applicable for conversations between native speakers of a language in particular contexts. There is not a single instance of the use of expletives or swear words in the corpus. In spite of what seemed like fewer options in terms of resources that are available for non-native speakers of a language, the EPPI students managed to create their own in-group language extracted from their shared history. Their in-group language allowed them to manipulate meaning to suit a variety of interactional purposes. Furthermore, I argue that ‘name combining,’ ‘ToRAAMba,’ ‘what’ and ‘you understand’ instantiate the development of a relational identity. As Cupach and Imahori (1993: 127) suggest, once interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds have formed substantial common ground and renegotiated separate cultural identities, ‘they may engage in symbolic acts such as mixing their respective native languages, or creating entirely new words to refer to certain concepts they share’. The EPPI students did not need to create new words, they made full use of the words that were readily available; they just infused them with new and multiple meanings and functions.

5.5.2 Shared Perspectives and Elliptical Language

In this section, I look at how the participants use *assumed* and *as though* common ground by using elliptical language. I am not, however, using ellipsis in a strictly grammatical sense. By elliptical language, I refer to instances where speakers do not finish their sentences, or do not explicitly say what they mean because they assume that the hearers will be able to recover their intended meaning.

Below, I show how the shared perspective between Velyvet and Elias surfaces and is made a visible part of common ground. Elias was getting ready for an information interview. As has been the EPPI ritual, the other students give the interviewee some tips and words of encouragement:

Week 5 WS310077.07.10.09 Tom's skin

- 14 Vely while you will be in the interview,
15 put yourself in Tom's skin and you will be fine. //
16 Tom // I missed that I missed that.
17 Vely it's (.) put Tom's SKIN.
18 Ss (laugh)
19 Eli ah okay, (laughs)
20 Tom that was that was an interesting expression,
21 Ss (laugh)
22 Eli Tom's skin, yeah okay. (laughs)
23 Tom an INTERESTING expression, what do you mean by that Velyvet ?
24 Vely HE understands (gaze turns to Elias)
25 Tom so how does he do that, Velyvet? (.) explain.
26 (5.0)
27 Tom so how does he do that?

28 Vely he understands, yes or no? // (looks at Elias)
 29 Eli // yeah
 30 Ss (laugh)
 31 Eli look for – I could understand that, RELAX, NATURAL (.)
 32 all POSITIVE things that we learnt from you.
 33 Vely right! (laughs)

Velyvet's advice to Elias, 'put yourself in Tom's skin' (line 15) seems puzzling for Tom (line 16) but Elias does not appear to have a problem with the expression (lines 19, 22). Tom insists on some explanation of 'Tom's skin' (lines 23, 25, 27), but instead of answering him directly, Velyvet says that Elias knows what the expression means (line 24). Elias articulates his understanding of 'Tom's skin' (lines 31, 32) but only after Velyvet puts him on the spot (line 28). Velyvet could have said something like 'relax, be natural – just like Tom.' Instead he deliberately sets up extra work for Elias not only to process what the expression meant but to explain it to Tom. He must have been confident that Elias would be able to decipher 'Tom's skin'. By appealing to an interactive display of his shared world with Elias through the use of elliptical language, Velyvet reinforces their common ground. By attributing to Elias the ability to successfully infer the meaning of 'Tom's skin,' he brings about 'contextual effects of an affective nature' (Aston 1988: 280). The expression 'Tom's skin' can also be argued to function as a compliment to Tom; as Elias says, it refers to 'all POSITIVE things that we learnt from you' (line 32).

The encounter below also concerns Velyvet and his feedback to Jinky after an interview role play where Tom acted as the employer and Jinky, the interviewee. After the mock interview Tom opens up the floor for comments from the audience:

Week 11 WS310159.18.11.09 Not Jinky

- 1 Tom ok? (3.0) s::o, let's hear from our observers,
- 2 Vely I would say SHE was not Jinky!
- 3 Tom (.) pardon me?
- 4 Vely SHE was NOT JINKY, for me TODAY!
- 5 Tom SHE was she was NOT JIN- who was she?
- 6 Vely she's better than THAT! //
- 7 Tom // she's BETTER than JINKY?
- 8 Vely she's better than THAT, yes!
- 9 Tom she's better than THAT?
- 10 Harl [yes]
- 11 Vely [yes!]
- 12 Tom you mean //
- 13 Vely // forget about THAT I think she's better than THAT.
- 14 Tom she's better than THIS? //
- 15 Vely yes! //
- 16 Tom // what do you mean?
- 17 Vely erm
- 18 Jink it's it's xxx

Velyvet insists that the person who just had a mock interview with Tom is 'not Jinky' because the Jinky that he knows is 'better that that' (lines 2, 4, 6, 8, 13). Harleen,

who seems to understand Velyvet's expression, agrees with his comments and supports his observation (line 10). Tom takes several turns to clarify what Velyvet meant by 'not Jinky' (lines 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 16). Velyvet explains in line 19 below:

19 Vely she didn't represent herself very well,

20 I KNOW HER! SHE's better.

21 Tom really? those are harsh words (.) Vely! //

22 Harl // maybe she was not

23 Vely [I KNOW HER], she's better!

24 Harl [prepared].

25 Vely she was not prepared, yes.

26 Tom those are HARSH words!

27 Vely [because I know] her, she is, yes

28 Tom [my goodness!]

29 Vely I KNOW HER!

Above, it becomes clear that Velyvet has been trying to mitigate the face threat of having to specify what he meant but since Tom refuses to 'let it pass' (Firth 1996), he verbalizes that Jinky 'didn't represent herself well' (line 19). Harleen (lines 22, 24) shows alignment with Velyvet who reciprocates by using the same words 'not prepared' (line 25).

Velyvet's insistence that he knows Jinky (lines 19, 23, 27, 29) enacts the depth and breadth of his common ground with her. From frequent interactions, Velyvet (and the rest of the students) has come to know Jinky to be competent, always prepared and articulate. This knowledge enables him (and Harleen) to claim that on that particular

day, Jinky was not being her usual self. Tom, however, thinks that Velyvet's comments are 'harsh' (lines 21, 26) so perhaps in an attempt to prevent hurt feelings and preserve common ground, he checks with Jinky (line 30):

- 30 Tom what do you think about this Jinky?
- 31 Jink thank you so much! (laughs)
- 32 Harl you want //
- 33 Vely // because I know her, yes
- 34 Tom xxx that's a compliment? (2.0) you're taking that as a compliment?
- 35 how how are you taking THAT as a compliment? (sounds shocked)
- 36 Jink erm because I'm taking it as a compliment because I
- 37 I erm I erm because they think I am a good (.) I am a good person and
- 38 I will be a good employee. (laughs)
- 39 Tom do you, do you feel you didn't do a good job in this interview? //
- 40 Jink // yeah!
- 41 Tom because you can only take that as a compliment if you feel you could
- 42 have done better.

Tom seems shocked (lines 34, 35, 41) that Jinky considers the 'harsh words' as compliment (line 36). It is obvious that he did not expect Jinky to say 'thank you so much' (line 22) to Velyvet's and Harleen's feedback. It appears that the three students occupy the same common ground while Tom does not. However, there is some negotiation of meaning in lines 41 and 42 as Tom says 'because you can only take that

as a compliment if you feel you could have done better.’ Tom’s utterance can be seen as an effort to align with his students’ perspective.

The ‘Not Jinky’ episode invites further reflection. It made visible the differences in common ground between teacher and students: what the students intended or perceived as compliment, Tom saw as harsh words. Velyvet’s deployment of elliptical language may have been intended to soften face threat but based on Tom’s reactions, it appeared to have caused the opposite effect. If we include the previous extract, ‘Tom’s skin,’ it becomes even more apparent that there were gaps in common ground between teacher and students. Is it because Tom is not a member of the in-group? Is it because of cultural differences? One possible interpretation is that there is more common ground amongst the students because they spend more time with each other while Tom is only with them during class. It might be that ‘in-groupness’ does not imply an either/or binary of either being ‘in’ or being ‘out,’ but there are different levels or degrees of being ‘in.’ It is open to debate but another interpretation may lie in the students’ identity as non-native speakers of English. Since they realise that they do not have the same proficiency as native speakers, they have come to rely on other skills such as intuition, guessing and empathy. They may be more open to the negotiation of meaning that is not dependent on pre-fabricated idioms or expressions. Attributing the difference of common ground between teacher and students to cultural differences is less plausible because we would have to assume that Haitian (Velyvet), Indian (Harleen) and Filipino (Jinky) cultures share a common perspective on the world that Canadians (Tom) do not.

5.5.3 Shared Expectations and Mutual Accountability

In the process of regular interaction over time, group members, ‘tend to standardize their activities to create customary ways of behaving that the whole group can recognise as norms’ (Applbaum et al. 1973: 60). These norms translate into a set of

unwritten rules of conduct and expectations of ‘mutual accountability’ (Wenger 1998: 81) which become visible when transgressions occur. In this section I use extracts taken from weeks 5, 9 and 12 of the programme to show that the EPPI common ground has expanded to include norms of interaction. The examples show that these norms, negotiated through mutual engagement, are well in place and being enforced by members.

The extract below (involving me) happened in week 5. Velyvet had an information interview in the morning. Within the Canadian context, an information interview involves speaking to people who are already employed in the field in which one is interested in working. The main goal is to gather as much information as possible about the specific field in order to make informed career decisions. When Velyvet came back from the interview, I did not have the opportunity to ask him how it went. Later that same day, Velyvet approached me just before the start of the computer class:

Week 5 WS310082.9.10.09 You didn’t ask me.

- 1 Vely you didn’t ask me h- how was my information interview.
- 2 Mab (sorry?)
- 3 Vely you didn’t (.) ASK (.) ME (.) how was my information interview. //
- 4 Mab // I wanted to ask you but you were eating,
- 5 Vely oh!
- 6 Mab yeah,
- 7 Vely it was good!

When Velyvet walked towards me I noticed that he looked disappointed. It seemed that he had expected me to show interest in the outcome of his interview (line 1). I had to ask for clarification (line 2) because I did not expect his line of questioning. His utterance in line 3 (you didn’t (.) ASK (.) ME (.) how was my information

interview) tells me that I have failed to live up to what was expected of me. My response in line 4 (I wanted to ask you but you were eating) was an attempt to save my face and to justify my action. Velyvet's 'oh!' in line 5 signals that he accepted my explanation, confirmed by line 7, 'it was good.'

The next extract which took place in week 9, also concerns Velyvet, this time with Elias. Tom was reminding Elias about his work placement interview scheduled that day. Velyvet, who had no knowledge of the interview, overheard the discussion and reacts:

Week 9 WS3100124.02.11.09 You didn't tell me.

- 24 Vely what's wrong Elias?
- 25 Mab Elias,
- 26 Eli whhh what? I did it? (xxx) (looks surprised and confused)
- 27 Vely WHY? (in a slightly stern voice)
- 28 Eli WHY? (1.0)
- 29 Vely we had coffee together,
- 30 Eli ah - wh WHY WHAT?
- 31 Vely no, no this morning we drank coffee together and
- 32 we joked together and you have an interview you didn't tell me!

Velyvet's line 24, (what's wrong Elias) appears confrontational which caught Elias off guard (lines 26, 28, 30). Velyvet seems disappointed that Elias has violated the 'unwritten rule': 'keep team/family members informed of your personal events.' Although they had coffee that morning, Elias did not say anything about his interview (lines 29, 31 and 32) which can be seen as a transgression of the group's shared ways of doing things. It has indeed been proposed that reporting to intimates about one's tracked events is a responsibility and not just an optional activity for those in close personal relationships (Pomerantz and Mandelbaum 2005: 169).

The next extract shows that sustaining common ground entails some policing so that members are held accountable for their actions. As Argyle (1994: 169) observes, when guides to interaction have been negotiated and accepted, they dictate the type of social behaviour that members are required to observe.

Only Jinky, Rachana and Harleen were present in the first hour of the class. They knew Phillip's and Elias's whereabouts but they did not know where Faisal was, which disappointed them because they had organised a lunch to mark the last day of the group as a class.

Week 12 WS3100178.25.11.09 He didn't tell us.

- 53 Jink [what about] Faisal?
- 54 Harl [Faisal?], Faisal is not coming? (looks at Tom)
- 55 Jink we were all so disappointed with him //
- 56 Tom // you were DISAPPOINTED? //
- 57 Jink // yesterday.
- 58 Tom with FAISAL?
- 59 Jink yes, yes! yesterday because //
- 60 Tom // WHY? (sounds shocked)
- 61 Jink he informed us yesterday that he's not coming
- 62 today the WHOLE day he will not be here, and it's like, 'what?'
- 63 Tom he DIDN'T let you know? //
- 64 Jink // he DIDN'T not let us know (xxx)
- 65 Tom [he let me KNOW last week]

66 Jink [not until yesterday]

67 Tom oh communication skills!

68 we have to work on that one with Mr. Hassan //

69 Jink // but I keep on - but I I I was talking to him everyday,

70 Tom and he DIDN'T say?

71 Harl [no!]

72 Jink [he didn't] say anything

73 Tom no::? we got to work on that! yeah //

74 Jink // not until YESTERDAY and it's like - oh my goodness!

75 Rach [I didn't know it,]

76 Jink [so even, Elias] was so disappointed!

77 Tom well, (.) yeah, I mean it's like //

78 Harl // it's like

79 Rach [because it's the last day everyone we thought everyone should be here,]

80 Harl [like after the lunch he told us that] //

81 Jink // YE::S! //

82 Harl // that he's not going to come [tomorrow]

83 Jink [and Elias was like] (.) 'he didn't told us.'

[...]

The above extract indicates not only that common ground has been solidified but also that it is being enforced. Terms of continued membership are being defined and

violations to accepted practices are being policed. Jinky expresses disappointment with Faisal for not letting the group know that he was not coming (line 55). A potluck lunch has been organised for that day so Rachana and Harleen are also disappointed (lines 79, 80) because they want everybody to be present. Tom co-constructs ‘disappointment’ as he says ‘oh communication skills!’ (line 67) and ‘we have to work on that with Mr. Hassan’ (line 68). His mention of communication skills (line 67) is of interest. It may have been intended to let Faisal off the hook or it may indicate that he views the matter as a communication problem. He usually calls Faisal by his first name so using a formal address, Mr. Hassan, can perhaps be likened to an angry parent calling a daughter Elizabeth instead of the less formal ‘Liz’. As the talk unfolds, Tom changes his stance:

136 Tom // erm erm I think it's not fair to talk about people when [they're not]

137 Jink [ye::s]

138 Tom present to defend themselves!

139 Harl yes, yes.

140 Tom erm if people have personal issues that they are dealing with,

141 sometimes other things get pushed OUT of their mind?

142 Jink oh yes, yes, yes (in a soft voice)

[...]

Tom assumes a teacher/team leader role as he tries to mediate a potential crack in the common ground (line 136). He disaffiliates from Jinky, Harleen and Rachana stating that it is not fair to talk about people who are absent. Notice that Harleen (line 139) and Jinky (lines 137, 142) immediately change their alignment and clearly signal their agreement with Tom. Jinky even justifies Faisal’s action (line 162-163):

161 Harl [xxx]

162 Jink [but to] be fair with him he he tried to phone me last night

163 but I just get the missed call//

164 Tom // oka::y,

By adopting an empathetic attitude towards Faisal, Jinky and Harleen re-claim common ground with Tom. Notice that first it was Tom who adopted Harleen's and Jinky's position towards Faisal's absence and then towards the end of the conversation the students shared the teacher's perspective. Indeed, it appears that teacher and students were trying to protect their common ground which entailed some negotiation of perspectives and attitudes.

The three extracts analysed in this section show how social interaction norms resulted as a by-product of mutual engagement over time; in other words, they show how the students' keeping track of each others' events and reporting one's activities to the group have evolved into 'legitimate and expectable activities' (Pomerantz and Mandelbaum 2005: 169) for the EPPI participants.

5.5.4 Shared Ways of Showing Involvement: Advice-giving

Giving advice was an integral component of the EPPI. The curriculum was built around giving students suggestions on the different aspect of finding and maintaining a job. The students were given opportunities to give and receive feedback from their peers. In the first month of the class, the students gave each other work-related advice. After a role play or phone call to an employer, the routine was to have everybody give comments on each other's performance. However, as the social distance between students became narrower, this narrowing reflected in the type of suggestions that they gave one another - they began to juxtapose professional advice with personal advice. The extracts in this section were taken from weeks 5, 8 and 9 when giving advice on personal matters had become a part of the shared repertoire. In this example, Elias was getting ready to leave for a work placement interview. Tom asks the students to give

him some suggestions on how to handle the interview. However, Faisal focuses instead on the ‘eye problem’. He presents his suggestion without any introductory preamble although the advice can be considered as unsolicited:

Week 5 WS310077.7.10.09 Eye problem

- 1 Fai I I have suggestion about that eye problem, the (.) some woolen thing
2 you know make hotter maybe iron or some xxx put it in your eyes,
3 it will help you BETTER than the even medicine.
4 Eli wh-what is it? metal?
5 Vely xxx
6 Fai for example any wool, wool sweater or that type of cloth any cloth you
7 can use over heated (.) iron you know iron you know
8 Eli ye::ah?
[...]

I should note that Elias has been having problems with his eyes which looked very red and swollen, thus Faisal’s concern (lines 1-3, 6-7). Below, Tom participates in the ‘eye problem’ advice giving (line 23) which was immediately taken up by Elias in line 24. But Elias is obviously unfamiliar with the practice of treating eye problems with heated wool as shown in his hesitation markers (line 22) below:

- 22 Eli but erm but erm I don’t have //
23 Tom // an iron with him! (laughs)
24 Eli I don't have iron I don't have time because I need to
25 Fai [no not NOW!]
26 Eli [go for interview]
27 Fai when you will go to your house!

Below, Velyvet aligns with Faisal and tells Elias to ‘just try’ (line 28). He may have interpreted Elias’s hesitation to be a rejection of Faisal’s suggestion so he tries to mitigate possible face threats between the adviser and the advisee, ‘he’s sorry about your eyes’. Elias seems to have understood Velyvet’s meta-message so he says ‘thank you’ (line 35) to show appreciation instead of hesitation.

- 28 Vely just try.
- 29 Eli xxx interview, I think you are talking about interview
- 30 Fai no no I'm not talking about interview because I am thinking
- 31 [and it will be very helpful for you, very helpful for you!]
- 32 Ss [(laugh)]
- 33 Fai it will be helpful for you.
- 34 Vely he's sorry about your eyes. //
- 35 Eli // o::kay thank you!

Faisal is insistent that Elias try his eye cure advice (lines 30-31, 33) which can be seen as imposing in that it impedes Elias’s freedom to do as he pleases (Brown and Levinson 1987). On the other hand, it can be argued that his ‘imposition’ is really a positive politeness output ‘notice, attend to hearer; exaggerate sympathy and intensify interest to hearer’ (Brown and Levinson 1987: 103-6). Bearing in mind that the shared goal established in the first four weeks of the programme is a joint enterprise of building team/family, it is not totally out of place to assume that members will consider advice-giving as supportive language. As already mentioned the negotiation of support involves a relationship of ‘caring and knowing’ (Aston 1993: 234). Consequently, showing care for Elias’s eye problem seems to have become one of the group’s shared ways of engaging in doing things together and displaying membership (Wenger 1998).

By week 8 of the programme, Elias was still having problems with his eyes which remained red and swollen. The episode below took place while the class was doing group work activities. Faisal and Elias were sitting at different tables so everybody could hear the conversation:

Week 8 WS3100IC.30.10. 09 Medicine of Coconut Something

1 Fail your eyes? (catches Elias's gaze to get his attention)

2 Eli it's bad again (.) last night I couldn't sleep (.)

3 Fai xxx

4 Eli I spend very bad night last night.

[...]

In the brief extract above, we see indicators of CofP: absence of introductory preamble, very quick set up of problem, and communication shortcut (Wenger 1998). Faisal simply starts with 'your eyes?' indicating shared previous history between the two speakers. As Maynard and Zimmerman (1984: 313) describe, 'acquainted parties largely produce topical introductory utterances whose understandability and relevance draws on their prior history of interaction, thereby making visible and reproducing a degree of intimacy such understandability presupposed'. Rachana, who is sitting beside Faisal, joins in with her own eye cure tips (lines 28, 30, 32-34):

28 Rach for me I use xxx the medicine of coconut something //

29 Fai // yeah

30 Rach when you put that whatever is there in your eye come out,

31 Harl [c-come out?]

32 Rach [it's very good] when you put early morning before sunrise

33 and before the the sunset in the evening (.) you have to put that.

34 you should you should not put it any time any other time.

The advice brainstorm on how best to cure Elias's eye problems went on for several more turns with Harleen and Jinky taking part. There was talk of eating more carrots, taking Vitamin A and D, trying antibiotics and drinking a special herbal concoction. The topic then extends to computer usage:

62 Fai another one it's my only opinion for long time you

63 do work on computer it is one of //

64 Harl // oh yeah!

65 Fai it is a problem, MAYBE when you work on computer (xxx)

Faisal gives a mitigated advice (it's my only opinion, line 62) about prolonged computer use (lines 63) which is supported by Harleen (line 64). This is a specific instantiation of common ground as shared knowledge and shared biography. Faisal and Harleen, as well as the rest of the class, know that Elias works part-time as a computer assistant for a department store. Their specific knowledge of Elias's personal circumstances turns into a resource for increasing the existing common ground. It is as if 'knowing' Elias is enough entitlement for 'caring' about him (Aston 1988; 1993).

An important question to ask is why the students were talking about cures for Elias's eye problem when they were supposed to be working on an employment-related written task that Tom had asked them to do. I return to this point in Chapter 7, Section 7.2.1. But Tom himself participates fully in the eye problem talk. He adds to Faisal's idea about Elias's prolonged computer use:

73 Tom well yeah I think we all experience that our eyes will

74 (deteriorate?) faster if we are working on computer monitor

75 than if we're not isn't that right,

According to Wenger (1998: 74), 'whatever it takes to make mutual engagement possible is an essential component of any practice.' For the EPPI participants, being

able to talk and interact with each other while doing specific tasks had become an important aspect of what it means to be included. It can be likened to small talk between colleagues near the water cooler or while waiting to use the photocopier. More importantly, the negotiated joint enterprise of becoming team/family seems to entail being able to show concern and involvement.

There was another occurrence of the eye problem talk between Faisal and Elias four days after the above episode. I do not include it here due to space limitations. In brief, Faisal suggested that Elias should go to a specialist and get prescription for an antibiotic. The point to be made is that the common ground between the two men seems to have acquired a special quality, which as I suggested earlier, may be due to their shared faith and the associated practices that go with it. The first two weeks of the EPPI classes coincided with the month of Ramadan. Both Elias and Faisal were fasting then. So, their mutual engagement is characterized not only by what they do with the group, but also by practices that they chose to engage in because of religious beliefs.

The mutual engagement between Faisal and Elias can be characterized as sustained, but not always harmonious. In Chapter 6, I analyse a serious misunderstanding between the two which took place in week 4 of the programme. In the extract below taken in the computer class, we see Elias and Faisal talking to each other while working on the computer:

Week 9	WS3100123.03.11.09	Call Rome
181	Eli	<u>did you call Rome?</u>
182	Fai	xxx it will be part time because after taking xxx
183		all this information, and this thing if I have a job
184		I go to northern Africa, Bangladesh all xxx
185		it will take at least one month.

- 186 Eli but it's good to make a follow up.
- 187 Fai yeah I'll do it!
- 188 Eli call! //
- 189 Fai // yeah.
- 190 Eli call them!

Line 181 tells us that Elias knows about Rome and Faisal knows that he knows about Rome; it is 'known in-common and taken-for-granted' (Maynard and Zimmerman 1984: 301). The interaction between the two men shows that common ground is being enacted and instantiated by the rapid flow of information, lack of introductory preamble, and swift set up of topic without explicit contextualization. Notice also the unmitigated directive in line 188 (call) and line 189 (call them) from Elias. Faisal agrees (line 187, 'yeah I'll do it, and line 189, 'yeah') which reinforces the closeness and intimacy of their relationship, like family members. Indeed it has been argued that directives are not necessarily face threatening; they can be viewed as signals of 'group membership and responsibility' (Rosaldo 1982, cited in Holtgraves 2002: 57). Just to provide a brief background: Faisal had sent an application for a job in Rome a few weeks earlier, all the participants knew about it. Elias used this common knowledge as an affiliative resource (Enfield 2008) allowing both parties to display and therefore sustain their common ground.

Giving advice can be considered a threat to the negative face of the addressee because it gives the message that the speaker wishes to impede on the addressee's freedom to act as they please (Brown and Levinson 1987: 66). It can be seen as distancing because the power relations put the adviser in the position of the knowledge expert and the advisee as less knowledgeable. But as the extracts above show, advice-giving seems to be an instantiation of mutual engagement and a way to maintain

common ground by ‘noticing and attending to hearer’s needs’ (Brown and Levinson 1987: 102). Indeed, advice-giving within the EPPI context can be interpreted as an act of demonstrating care (Aston 1988; 1993), involvement (Scollon and Scollon 2001) and creating team (Holmes and Marra 2004). It can also be viewed as constructing family relations: family members are supposed to care for each other. In other words, advice-giving and receiving has become a negotiated and accepted practice of showing in-group membership. It can be argued that advice-giving is one way of enacting intimacy as people would not normally dispense advice freely to those they are not on familiar terms with (Sacks 1989: 324), except of course in professional counseling situations. By accepting the advice, regardless of whether or not they follow through, the recipients co-construct the ‘incumbency in close relationships’ (Pomerantz and Mandelbaum 2005: 169). Because of the EPPI participants’ shared interactional history, they are able to rely on each other’s co-construction of what it means to show involvement.

5.5.5 Shared Values for Preserving Common Ground

Thus far, I have explored how the EPPI participants enact, maintain and solidify the building blocks of their ‘one team, one family.’ In this section, I show how participants do relational repair to what they perceive may be potential cracks to their common ground. The extract below occurred after the ‘Not Jinky’ episode discussed in Section 5.5.2. Velyvet checks to make sure that his ‘harsh comments’ did not hurt Jinky’s feelings:

Week 11 WS310159.18.11.09 I trust you

- 1 Vely about my comment, how did you feel? //
- 2 Jink // for me it was a compliment although you said that so
- 3 erm erm although erm the the message is that

4 I did not make a good job right?

5 Vely uhummm.

6 Jink but (.) erm behind that message, is the is that is the word

7 that you're saying I trust you, I know you.

8 Harl yes.

9 Jink you you I know you I know you can do a good job so

10 it was really a compliment for me.

Velyvet's question in line 1 is a rapid set up of the topic without a need for introduction. He knows that Jinky knows which 'comment' he is referring to. It belongs to 'the domain of matters than can be addressed flat out without summons, alerting, or ground laying' for those who are intimates (Goffman 1997: 184). Jinky reiterates what she told Tom earlier - that she considers Velyvet's feedback as a compliment (lines 2 to 4) although she 'did not make a good job.' She verbalizes her interpretation of Velyvet's message through a personal-centre switch (Brown and Levinson 1987: 119), 'I trust you, I know you' (line 7), and in line 9, 'I know you I know you can do a good job.' Jinky's use of personal centre-switch, speaking as if she was Velyvet, does not only exemplify affective convergence (Aston 1988, 1993); it enacts common ground which is powerfully brought to the surface when she used 'know' three times (lines 7, 9). It is this 'knowledge' built out of eleven weeks of daily interactions and mutual engagement that made it possible for Jinky to interpret Velyvet's words in the way they were intended. Her direct voicing of Velyvet's thoughts, 'I trust you, I know you' says it all - common ground has enabled them to inhabit and make sense of their shared world. Thus common ground can be seen to facilitate communication because of its focus on the meaning rather than linguistic forms.

In the previous chapter (Section 4.5.1), we saw Greg apologising to the students for ‘rambling’ because of the side effects of the medication he was taking. Below, I show another apology from him written on the white board:

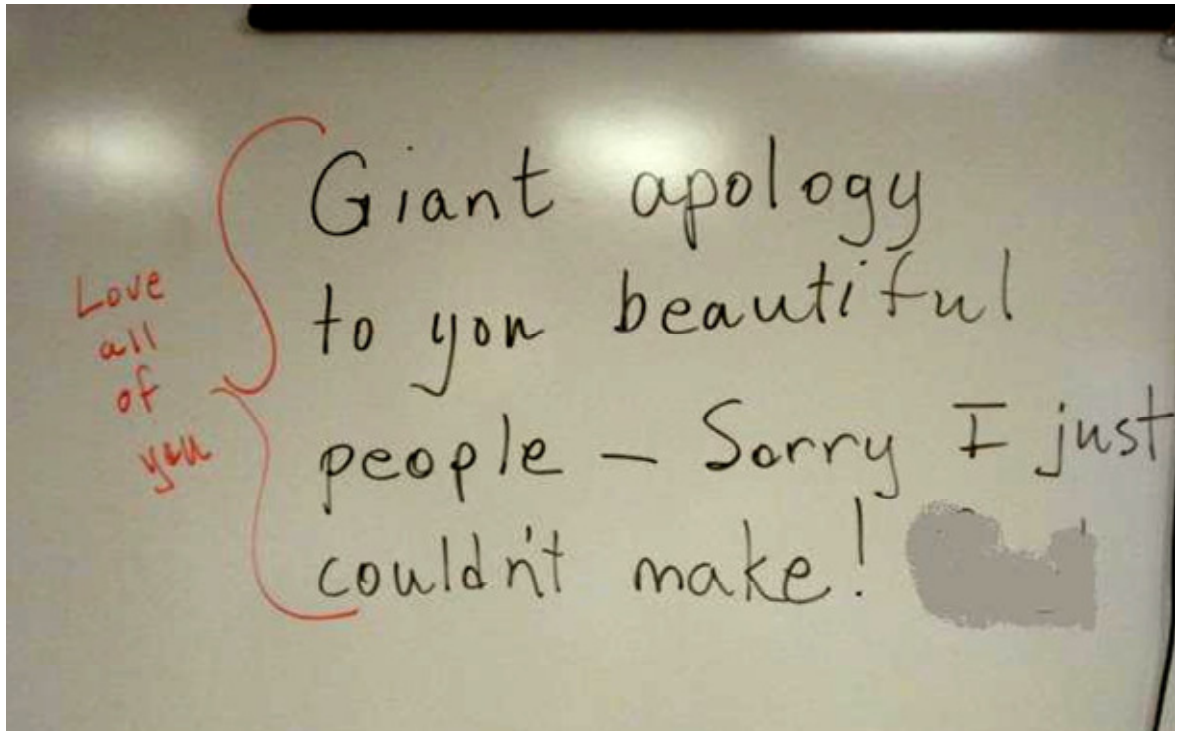


Figure 11 Greg's apology

Week 12 Last day of class Love all of you

Greg wrote the apology on the board because he was not able to come to his last class due to medical problems. On the day that he wrote the above, there was a special lunch at the college as a send-off to the students. Greg came in early and his written apology was already on the board by the time the students entered the classroom. The words are especially telling – why ‘giant’ apology (instead of ‘big’ or ‘huge’); why ‘beautiful people’; and why ‘love all of you’ in red ink? The elaborateness of an apology is usually determined by the seriousness of the offence, the social distance and power relations between interactants (Brown and Levinson 1987; Holmes 1990; 1998). The repetitious nature of his apology (giant apology, sorry) suggests that Greg considers

missing class a serious offence despite his valid medical excuse. He constructs an image of a very responsible teacher who really cares about his students.

The affectionate relationship Greg has with the students shows in his use of ‘beautiful people’ and ‘love all of you.’ If we consider the power relations – the more powerful teacher apologising to the students, on-record for everyone to see – then we get clues as to how he was willing to threaten his own face to address the face needs of his students. The fact that Greg’s apology was written on the day after his last teaching day with the class probably indicates that he wanted his common ground with the students to be maintained even after the classroom phase.

5.6 LEAVING COMMON GROUND

5.6.1 Approaching the End Points

In Chapter 3, I showed a diagram of the EPPI seating arrangement: in the first eight weeks of the class, it was U-shaped with a teacher-fronted style. It was changed into a boardroom style in the ninth week where students and teachers sat around a rectangular table. It was Tom’s idea to change the seating arrangement. After he got the students to help him move the tables and chairs around, his exact words were: ‘I think this might be better, a lot warmer more personal atmosphere. He also said ‘I like getting a little intimate.’ The extract below shows Tom and Elias, who came in a few minutes late because of a job interview:

Week 9 WS 3100124.4.11.09 Our commonalities unite us

52 Eli erm having such a table, you feel (.) the spirit of the team //

54 Tom // yeah!

55 Eli [not erm] //

56 Tom [my point, EXACTLY]

57 Eli not erm as individuals //

58 Tom // THAT's my point yeah,

59 Eli [as individuals]

60 Tom [right] and I think that one thing that we need to stress is that

61 although we're individuals, erm our our commonalities UNITE us!

62 right, we have - we actually have a lot in common,

It will be recalled that in Section 4.3, I used the voices of Elias and Tom to begin the telling of the EPPI group biography. Tom and Elias echoed each other's shared goal in negotiating a joint enterprise of 'one team, one family.' I suggest that the new 'intimate' seating arrangement reflects the EPPI's negotiated 'history of mutual engagement' as the members imbue physical artifacts with their own symbolic meaning (Wenger 1998: 83). Put another way, the 'joint' aspect of the enterprise of building team has been instantiated.

The rhythmical texture of Tom's and Elias's back and forth exchange shows alignment, shared perspectives and assumptions - a discursive construction of in-group membership, relational identity and affective convergence. When analysing the above utterance, I was a bit surprised by Tom's lines 60 to 61 (I think that one thing we need to stress is that although we're individuals, erm our our commonalities UNITE us!). I was surprised because it seemed redundant. The point has been made with the rearrangement of the room that the group has cohered as a team, and Elias agreed that the new seating was more reflective of team spirit (line 52). Throughout the duration of the programme, the one thing I observed that was very consistent with Tom was the important value he placed on relationships. I elaborate on this point in the next two sections below.

5.6.2 A ‘Long Conversation’

In Chapter 4, Section 4.3, the extracts showed how Elias echoed Tom’s sentiments about being a team. It will be recalled that in week 2, Tom explained that the cooking class was an opportunity for the students to bond and to gel together as a team. A week later, in his lunchtime address, Elias said that the EPPI was more than team, it was family. He extended his notion of family to include ‘our beautiful Canada.’ In this section, I show the continuation of their ‘long conversation’ (Maybin 1994; Lillis 2008), here defined as conversations between participants that transcend space and time so that they appear to be threads of the same ongoing talk. In the extract below and the last analysis section of this chapter, I show that the ‘long conversation’ was carried through by Tom and Elias until the end of the EPPI classroom phase.

With only a few days left before the class ends, Tom tries to encourage the students to continue supporting each other even though they will be placed in different work placement sites:

Week 11 WS310158.18.11.09 In the same boat

- 1 Tom we go on in quite a JOURNEY in these three months
- 2 people actually become very close in this programme
- 3 Jink yeah!
- 4 Tom probably, I will - my guess is (.) I'm probably biased, //
- 5 Mab // uh-humm
- 6 Tom probably more so in this programme than
- 7 most others at the college that erm people are erm
- 8 all of you erm have done a good job supporting each other

9 Harl YES!

10 Tom throughout the erm in the last 12 weeks

11 and that's something that you might NOT erm another programme

12 erm because you're all you're kind of in the same BOAT! //

13 Ss // Yes!

14 Tom and you may come from different VE::RY different background

15 but you're ALL are in the same boat and erm

16 it would be REALLY AWFUL if one would paddle in one

17 direction another paddle in another direction the boat goes around circles

18 Ss (laugh)

19 Tom but you ALL erm you find a way to make the boat go in one direction,

20 and that's good, that's good teamwork!

21 and erm Mabel says it's BEYOND teamwork she's talking about,

22 you are now an extended FAMILY (.) to each other

23 so you have erm brothers and sisters erm

24 that you you develop strong bonds,

25 DON'T LET THOSE BONDS break. try to hang on to those bonds,

26 because you'll need each other over the next few months erm

If we connect the above utterance from week 11 with the excerpt in week 2 where Tom emphasised the team building purpose of the cooking class, it seems safe to assume that he considers the goal to have been achieved, with assent from the students

(lines 3, 9, 13). But whereas in the week 2 excerpt, he used the inclusive personal pronoun 'we' twelve times, as he put the call out for team building; in the week 11 talk, he used the distancing second person pronoun 'you' thirteen times. In lines 22 to 23 in particular, (you are now an extended FAMILY (.) to each other so you have erm brothers and sisters erm that you you develop strong bonds,) his use of 'you' gives the impression that he is detaching himself from the team, from the family. My reading of his pronoun use is that he is preparing to 'let go' of the students as the classroom phase ends.

In line 21 where Tom mentioned my name, he was referring to what I said earlier when he asked me explicitly what I thought about the past three months and I said that the students seemed more confident and better able to articulate their job skills. I attributed what I perceived was improvement to good relations amongst the students. My exact words were 'and what most of you already know I think that's to do with ...with the group and family environment.'

The word 'now' in Tom's line 22, (you are now an extended family) is noteworthy because it encapsulates the historical process that the group has gone through from being total strangers to 'now' being brothers and sisters. Tom goes on to say:

34 Tom there's an opportunity and be excited
35 embrace that OPPORTUNITY, EMBRACE that new new day
36 that new dawn embrace it! I'm here and I'm erm glad I'm here I'm glad
37 I'm in this workplace because I can make a contribution, you know.
38 I I can I have something to offer and ermm continue to support each
39 each other throughout the time and YOU'LL BE FINE.

40 YOU'RE GONNA MAKE IT!

41 yeah, thank you Mabel.

Above (lines 36 to 38) Tom does a personal centre-switch and talks as if he were one of the students (I'm here and I'm erm glad I'm here I'm glad I'm in this workplace because I can make a contribution, you know. I I can I have something to offer). This switch has the effect of conveying involvement and intensifying interest in his students' future work experience placements (Brown and Levinson 1987).

Below, Elias responds to Tom by praising him for being a good leader and the 'whole gang' which shows that his interests and wants are the same as the programme's interests and wants. In line 46 when I said 'most definitely' it was a spontaneous reaction, aligning with Elias's previous utterance and also expressing appreciation for the teachers' hard work.

42 Eli erm (clears throat) yeah one thing also (.) I want to ASSURE

43 it's a fact that erm that also that our success

44 and this is the output of the the (.) outcome of these three months

45 also that we have a good leader in the school (laughs)

46 Mab most definitely!

47 Eli yeah we have a GOOD leader and also we are proud with this relation

48 with this you know first of all our leader Tom and Marra

49 and erm the whole gang that supported us, Kate, Greg and (Hilda?)

Below, Elias invokes the family metaphor and presupposes common ground (line 51, 54), the same sentiments that Harleen (line 52) and Jinky (line 53) share. In line 54, Elias attributes 'the spirit of the family' (line 50 and 51) to 'because we know each other' (line 54). This 'knowing each other' harks back to Tom's cooking class

extract when he talked about getting to know each other – another instantiation of their ‘long conversation’ (Maybin 2004; Lillis 2008).

- 50 erm this is I think that that erm we we talk about the spirit of
51 the family it is my feeling and I'm SURE this is the feeling //
52 Harl [that's right!]
53 Jink [yes!]
54 Eli of everybody (.) because we know each other and erm (.)

Jinky's, Harleen's and Elias's utterances serve as a way of affirming the vision that Tom had for the students to become a team. As Gergen, Gergen and Barret (2004: 46) state, 'to affirm is to ratify the significance of an utterance as a meaningful act. It is to locate something within an expression that is valuable, to which one can agree and render support'.

Below, Elias expresses his desire for the relationship to continue after the end of the 12 weeks (lines 55, 56) which seem to echo Tom's previous plea: 'don't let those bonds break' (line 25) and 'you'll need each other over the next few months' (line 26).

- 55 Eli actually also I hope that this will extend the relationship
56 it will not be just few months and even AFTER
57 I (.) don't imagine I hope that even after we get job,
58 we'll never forget these very nice three months so we'll keep on

Mirroring and affirming Tom's previous utterance, Elias also ends his talk on an upbeat note giving encouragement to the students. He also constructs an identity as a student leader:

- 59 Eli (.) and just another reminder,
60 that erm all of you guys and all of us just erm just I want to (.)
61 STRENGTH or assure that erm Jinky said yesterday I met with her,

62 ALL of you you have the (.) SOURCE!
 63 and here we appreciate we do appreciate our leaders in this programme
 64 they polish your skills, you have wonderful skills and we do appreciate
 65 that they polish and don't feel that you don't have anything
 66 you have a LOT of things and here this
 67 is the encouragement they polish the skills our skills and (xxx) and
 68 SURE YOU have the skills, you have the confidence,
 69 you have the - DON'T FORGET this training!
 76 you have it POLISHED now and you are ready to GO
 77 you are ready all the time any place any time! (.)
 78 so this is how we are NOW (.) the EPPI.

In line 59, Elias adopts the stance of someone in a position of authority. Just like Tom, he uses the distancing second person pronoun 'you' a number of times (15 times). He also uses 'we' eight times as he weaves in and out of being a group member and a group leader. As he assumes a leader identity, he extends and adopts Tom's words earlier that make reference to 'contribution' and 'something to offer' (line 38). If we take into consideration that English is not Elias's native language, we might be able to fully appreciate the effort that he invests into making himself understood and at the same time maintaining rapport with Tom and the other students. In lines 60 and 61, (I want to (.) STRENGTH or assure that...) his use of the word 'strength' is marked. My interpretation is that he was looking for the word 'emphasise' and in line 62 where he used the word 'SOURCE' (...you have the (.) SOURCE), it looked as if he meant 'resources'. Both words were preceded by a brief pause, which may indicate that he was searching for the appropriate vocabulary. If we go further back when Elias says 'and this is the output of the the (.) outcome of these three months' (line 44), we see evidence

that he is not a native speaker of English. He uses Arabic to speak with his family and friends and his primary use of English is tied to his educational and career background in computer science. Whereas speakers of the same linguistic background might use phonological convergence to show accommodation, Elias employs thanking and praising not only to show accommodation but also to affirm common ground. In other words, despite linguistic constraints, Elias uses his available resources to maximum effect. Lines 76 to 78 instantiate Elias's convergence to Tom's communication style. He re-voices Tom's words giving them a quality of rhythmical synchrony where the effect is a 'ritual display[s] of agreement and mutual appreciation' (Aston 1993: 226). While Tom ended his utterance with YOU'LL BE FINE (line 39) and YOU'RE GONNA MAKE IT! (line 40), Elias ends his with 'you are ready to GO' (line 76) and 'you are ready all the time any place any time!' (line 77). Furthermore, just like in Tom's line 22, (you are now an extended family), the word 'now' is also deployed powerfully by Elias in line 76 (you have it polished now) and line 78 (so this is how we are NOW (.) the EPPI.), which can be seen as convergence from an Accommodation Theory perspective. His adoption of Tom's stance and words can also be interpreted as an act of 'affirmation' which according to Gergen et al. (2004: 46) means to 'grant worth to, or to honour, the validity of the other's subjectivity'.

5.6.3 Go with Peace and Hope and Joy

To mark the last day of the class, Tom created a Powerpoint slide with the following words displayed on the screen on 25th November 2009, week 12:

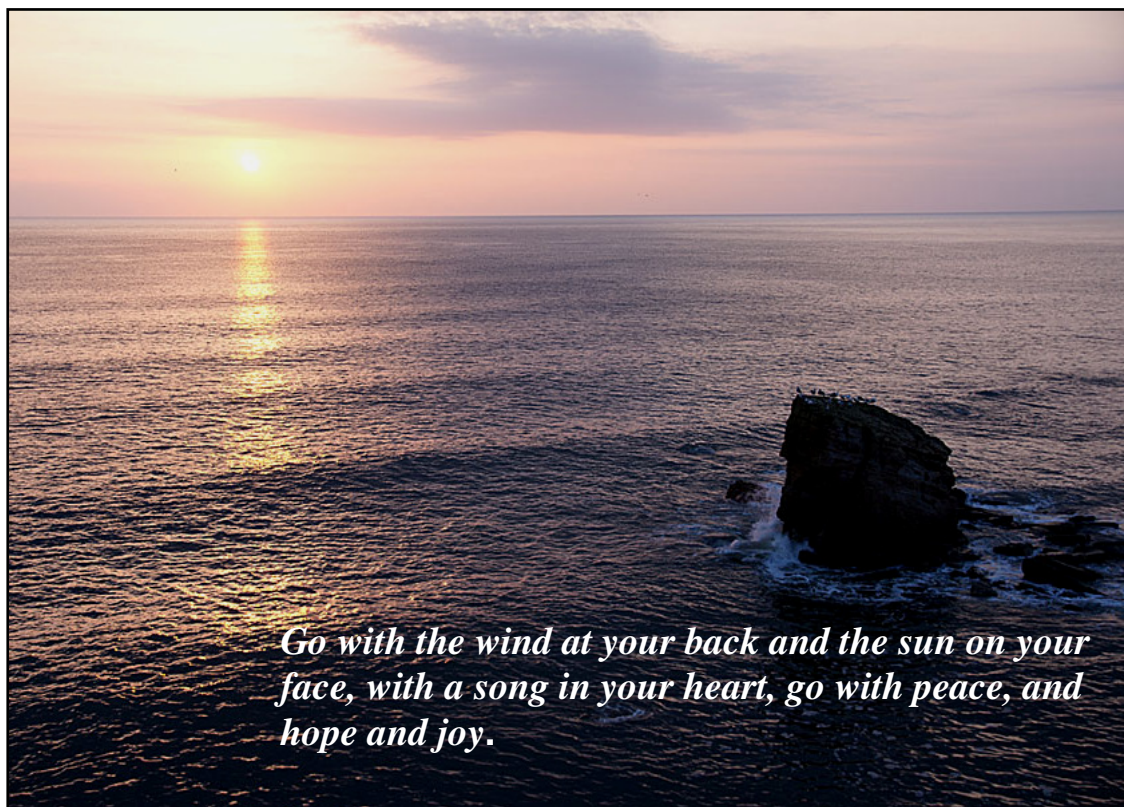


Figure 12 PowerPoint Slide

I was unable to take a picture of the actual PowerPoint slide that Tom showed the class. The image above (downloaded from <http://www.freefoto.com/preview/104-17-8187/Volcanic-ash-sunrise>) corresponds closely to my recollection of it. My intention in including Figure 12 in this thesis is to give readers an idea of what the students saw as they entered the classroom on the last day of their class. The PowerPoint slide conveys Tom's final message to the students. He said that he spent most of the previous evening trying to design the slide with the sun rise, *not* sunset (according to him) background. The morning was spent reading inspirational poems and stories that he selected for the class. There was also discussion of final arrangements for the students' work experience placements.

As a celebration of their time together and a thank-you to the staff, the students organised a farewell lunch on the last day. All seven students were involved in planning

the event from deciding on the menu to sending out the invitations to buying food and cutlery. The extracts below were taken from that lunch:

Week 12 WS310179. 25.11.09 A sad day

54 Tom This is a sad day for Tom Cooper because Tom really enjoyed
55 his time in the last twelve weeks (.) and erm you know
56 in the blink of an eye (.) erm the three months in my in my eyes
57 REALLY REALLY re::ally flew by and I think that speaks to how erm
58 much I enjoyed my time (.) and I really am SAD that all of a sudden,
59 I don't get to see erm my EPPI students
60 any MORE! every day! I mean I get to see you but I don't get to see you
61 every day, and erm it - it always - you know,
62 I always look forward to it and erm
63 I enjoyed my time with YOU so it IS a SAD day for me today.
64 I have to I have to be HONEST about that erm

Tom expresses his feelings about the ending of the classroom phase of the programme. Line 54 is especially telling because he refers to himself in the third person using his full name 'Tom Cooper' and first name 'Tom.' In line 55, he refers to himself in the third person. I interpret this as an indication that he is foregrounding his identity as Tom Cooper, the person, instead of Tom Cooper, the teacher. This suggests perhaps that while the student-teacher relationship is coming to an end, the connection between him and the class members may well go beyond that. At one point during the event, he had difficulty holding back his tears and his face turned red. Tom concludes his speech with a motivational tone:

72 Tom although I am - a lot of ME is sad a LOT, a LOT more of
73 me is very excited about about THAT that you get to go out and

74 CARVE your way into CANADIAN erm you know being part of Canada
 75 and making a contribution erm and erm I just know you're going to do
 76 really well! and I'm really PROUD (.) of all we've ACHIEVED over
 77 these last three months, and I'm looking forward to the future.

I mentioned earlier that it was Elias who extended Tom's notion of team to family. Elias also went beyond the EPPI to the 'BIG Canadian family' which I argued was part of his identity repertoire as an immigrant. To use a CofP lens, Elias can be seen to be aligning himself not only with the EPPI team but with an 'imagined community' of Canadians (McConnell-Ginet 2003: 72). Above, Tom demonstrates that he has picked up on the Canadian theme (CARVE your way into CANADIAN erm you know being part of Canada) which was made salient by Elias in his lunchtime speech to the class and guests eight weeks earlier. In other words, Tom's speech can be seen as a continuation of the 'long conversation' with Elias two months previously.

Below, Elias, who was the last one to speak because he was facilitating the event, shows affective convergence with Tom and reiterates the Canadian family theme. Then, reminiscent of his address in the first group lunch in the third week of the class, he again invokes the family metaphor:

Week 12 WS310179.25.11.09.25 Success as one family

159 Eli everybody haven't met before, we have been here, we have success
 160 as one family and we do it in the workplace to continue and to
 161 (PERFORM?) our skills our experience to build (.) our beautiful Canada.

In the above extract, Elias emphasises that in spite of not having met before (lines 159-160) the members of the class were able to come together as a successful family. He affirms Tom's vision of making a contribution to Canada in lines 160 and 161 by saying 'we do it in the workplace to continue and to (PERFORM?) our skills our

experience to build (.) our beautiful Canada.’ Indeed, from the early days to the last day of the programme, Elias has maintained common ground with Tom, hearable as ‘what you want for us, we want for us, too.’

In this final section, I have explored the journey of the EPPI participants using the ‘long conversations’ between Elias and Tom which began in the second week of the programme (Chapter 4, Section 4.3). I used the two key characters’ voices as a guide to frame the beginning and the ending of the EPPI’s existence as a group.

5.7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that the foundation of the common ground erected by the EPPI participants in the first four weeks of the programme (Chapter 4) was actively maintained until the last day of the class. As I have shown, the participants heavily drew upon their shared experience and history to enact the growing closeness in their relationships (Pomerantz and Mandelbaum 2005: 169). They solidified the building blocks of their common ground by creating an atmosphere built out of shared narratives and salient identities. As personal stories were exchanged, borders that separate teacher-students roles were blurred, making space for the development of relational identities. Kate, in collaboration with the students, made ‘unofficial’ talk in the computer class as an opportune space for sharing personal anecdotes and invoking other identities. We have also seen how Greg invoked the identity of a *Tagalog* language learner which made salient Jinky’s identity as a language expert, being a native speaker of *Tagalog*. Humour penetrated the threads of many EPPI interactions as it instantiates harmonious ‘sustained mutual relationships’ (Wenger 1998: 125). Teasing, in particular, evolved into a way of conveying liking, affection and acceptance – a meaning defined by the members. It was also found to be a clear indication that common ground was being maintained. It was not just the act of teasing itself though but more the topic of the tease

that made it an instantiation of one team, one family. It was constructed out of the group's interactional history and knowledge of each other. The lunchtime conversation 'Unlike the other Filipinos' between Jinky, Harleen, Rachana and Velyvet demonstrated their creativity and resourcefulness in creating commonality out of differences. By distancing themselves from their own cultural stereotypes, they formed an in-group of 'out-group members'; in other words, they turned lack of common ground into common ground.

I have shown how mutual engagement over time was reflected in language use and how language (in turn) continued to reinforce the maintenance of common ground. The EPPI group identity and in-group membership were signalled through the use of name-combining, in-group markers like 'ToRAAMba,' 'what,' and 'you understand' which served to symbolize and index the group's shared biography. Combining first and last names and place of origin (My name is..., I'm from....) may seem like nonsensical mumbo jumbo to an outsider. But to the students, they were like slogans that sum up their expanding common ground. As Goffman (1997: 184) points out, 'what we think of as a relationship is, in one sense, merely a provision for the use of cryptic expressions, a provision of what is required in order to allude to things economically'.

The 'Not Jinky' and 'Tom's Skin' extracts shed some light on the complex nature of what is 'common' in common ground. While the students did not seem to have any problems deciphering what 'Not Jinky' and 'Tom's Skin' meant (although it was clear they had not used the expressions with each other before), the teacher had difficulty understanding what they were referring to. I suggested two possible interpretations: first, that since students spent more time together, the common ground that they shared was broader and deeper; second, that the multilingual students were able to draw upon other skills such as intuition, guessing and empathy. I posited that being non-native

speakers of English, they might have been more flexible and open to the negotiation of new meanings. They were able to summon the resources they already had to match the demands of the situation and express their intended meaning (Canagarajah 2007: 933). Although they were able to negotiate meaning with Tom who refused to 'let it pass', there are questions worth asking: what happens outside of the EPPI classrooms when they communicate with native speakers of Canadian English, who, unlike Tom, may not be open to negotiating new meanings? Are their linguistic infelicities only acceptable and understandable to other non-native speakers? I do not have answers to these questions, but I argue that they are worth further investigation.

I illustrated through three different examples (in one of which I was a participant) that a group norm of informing each other about personal appointments has emerged over time. Velyvet, in the fifth week of the programme was disappointed that I did not ask him about his interview. In the ninth week of the programme, Velyvet was disappointed with Elias for not telling him about a job interview. In week 12, Jinky, Harleen and Rachana expressed displeasure because Faisal failed to inform them that he was going to be absent from class; and, according to Goffmann (1997: 184), it is an 'important obligation (and right) to update our associates about any change in our life circumstances'.

By not keeping the other students updated about the goings on in his social calendar, Faisal can be seen to have failed to renew and nurture his relationship with them. It can be argued that keeping one's intimates informed of one's activities provides the interactants with 'a shared orientation for reference' whenever they come in contact with each other (Goffman 1997: 184) In CofP terms, Faisal did not 'display certain styles recognized as displaying membership' (Wenger 1998: 126). Indeed, it is when transgressions happen that we get a very close glimpse of participants' effort to protect

their common ground, their one team, one family. Other indicators of CofP found in the data were inside jokes, knowing laughter; jargon and communication shortcuts; quick set up of conversations without introductory preambles and shared ways of doing things. These indicators embody the group's shared perspective, attitudes, assumptions and values.

Another shared practice that developed through frequent interactions and mutual engagement over time was advice-giving. I showed extracts of participants giving Elias 'medical' advice to cure his eye problems. I also showed Elias giving Faisal directives regarding a job application in Rome. It does seem that advice-giving has developed as one of the ways in which the EPPI participants showed high involvement (Scollon and Scollon 2001) and 'caring and knowing' (Aston 1993: 234). Indeed, a by-product of the participants' interactions overtime was a set of unwritten rules of interaction which served as ready-made resources for the maintenance of common ground.

Members' efforts to protect common ground and sustain harmonious relationships were enacted in a number of ways. Velyvet, for example, checked with Jinky to make sure that she was not hurt by his comments. Greg wrote a public, on-record apology on the white board to say he was sorry for not being able to make it to the last teaching day of the class – an indication that he would rather threaten his own face than risk his in-group membership. In Chapter 6, I give more examples that demonstrate how the EPPI participants attend to common ground in the face of misunderstanding.

I also analysed extracts taken from the last weeks of the classroom phase. Chairs were rearranged to reflect 'team spirit,' to use Elias's words. Instead of a teacher-centred arrangement with individual pods arranged in a semi circle; the tables and chairs were moved to form one big rectangular table in the middle with students and teachers

seating around it. The 'long conversations' started in the beginning points of the programme by Tom and Elias seemed to have been carried through time and space. In the first weeks of the class we saw them looking *forward* to a team/family relationship amongst the members. On the last day of the programme, they echoed the same theme and sentiments except this time they were looking *backwards* at how the EPPI class had become more than a team, it was a family.

CHAPTER SIX

‘MISCOMMUNICATION’ AND COMMON GROUND

So the conflict is good because we can learn something out of that. Like we discussed we have different ideas, different opinions. And out of those different things we get a result, and that could be good or bad.

Harleen, research participant

6.1 INTRODUCTION

It has been argued that there are two ways in which communication between individuals from different discourse systems can be improved: first, by increasing shared knowledge, which is one dimension of common ground; second, by managing miscommunication (Scollon and Scollon 2001: 23). While Chapters 4 and 5 showed how the EPPI participants increased shared knowledge, this chapter focusses on how they handle miscommunication.

This chapter challenges the common view that miscommunication often leads to negative consequences such as interpersonal conflict, misattribution of intentions, and communication breakdown. I show how miscommunication can ‘positively contribute to ongoing interaction and social relationships’ (Coupland, Wiemann and Giles 1991: 3). I also explore how intentional miscommunication can be used as an interactional resource to mitigate face threats. Thus, an overall aim of this chapter is to help ‘rescue miscommunication from its theoretical and empirical exile, and explore its rich explanatory potential’ in intercultural contexts (Coupland et al. 1991: 2).

It ought to be said at the outset that ‘common ground’ also figures in some of the data analysis in this chapter. The main difference though between the deployment of common ground in this chapter and the two previous ones is function. While in Chapters 4 and 5, common ground mainly has a team building function, in this chapter,

I show how the claim to common ground is evoked for its restorative and repair capability in the face of conflict caused by misunderstanding.

I have divided the rest of this chapter into five sections. Section 6.2 gives an overview of related literature on miscommunication, and offers a clarification of terms used herewith. It also discusses the analytic framework used in the analysis. Section 6.3 deals with how proactive work in talk is used by the teachers of the EPPI to prevent misunderstanding. Section 6.4 shows how miscommunication can lead to positive results. Section 6.5 explores how intentional miscommunication can be used strategically for humour and face management. Section 6.6 summarises the findings including methodological implications for the study of miscommunication in specific contexts.

6.2 UNDERSTANDING ‘MISCOMMUNICATION’

6.2.1 The term ‘miscommunication’ in this study

It is claimed that miscommunication refers to a ‘potential *breakdown point* in conversation, or at least a kind of communicative *turbulence*’ (Mauranen 2006: 128, my emphasis). Banks, Ge and Baker (1991: 104) consider it is a form of ‘*troubled* or *problematic* talk’ while others look at miscommunication as an umbrella term applied to ‘any sort of *problem* that might arise interactionally, and typically to local processes of misunderstanding’ (Coupland et al. 1991: 1, my emphasis). Because mutual understanding characterised by a smooth flow of talk is considered as the default assumption in human communication (Mauranen 2006), miscommunication tends to be seen as something to be avoided as it leads to negative consequences such as communication *breakdowns*, *turbulences*, *problems* and *troubles*.

In this thesis, I use miscommunication and misunderstanding to refer to a ‘communication incident in which the listener interprets an utterance in a different way from what the speaker has intended’ (Chiang 2009: 380). I use miscommunication and misunderstanding synonymously as instances when there are ‘discrepancies between parties in the interpretation or understanding of what is said or done in dialogue’ (Linell 1995: 176-177).

I argue, following Bailey (2004), that there cannot be a perfect one to one correspondence between one person’s intended meaning and the hearer’s uptake of it: ‘given individual and situational difference in subjective structuring and experiencing of the world, no two individuals share identical perspectives or understanding of any subjectively constituted phenomenon, including linguistic signs’ (ibid: 397). Indeed there is no single correct meaning that can be assigned to an utterance as ‘understanding is partial and fragmentary’ (Linell 1995: 185). This means that communicative *success* does not entail a perfect match between the speaker’s intended meaning and the listener’s interpretation of it but rather a ‘mutually acceptable outcome’ (Kasper 1997: 348). Achieving a working level of understanding therefore is not a passive ability but entails the active and collaborative engagement of interactants in order to arrive at a negotiated meaning (Pitzl 2005; Chiang 2009). Since miscommunication cohabits with communication (Linell 1995: 184), participants in a conversation need to develop interactional strategies to arrive at a level of understanding that may not be perfect but that is sufficient for the interaction to continue.

6.2.2 Identifying Instances of Miscommunication

Identifying instances of miscommunication is not an easy task because spoken discourse is often characterised by the continuous negotiation of meaning, disagreements, and mishearings that may be quickly repaired (Linell 1995: 186). A

smooth flowing conversation between two interlocutors is not a guarantee that the participants have established mutual understanding. A back channel response for example may indicate agreement and alignment but it can also mean superficial cooperation. As discussed earlier, Firth (1996) claims that *lingua franca* speakers may opt to ‘let it pass’ or dis-attend to difficult expressions instead of halting the talk to clarify meaning - hoping that the contextual meaning of the problematic expression will become evident as the talk ensues. On the other hand, some conversations may have a shakier appearance characterised by repairs and clarification requests but this does not mean that the talk is turbulent or problematic. To illustrate the complexity of unpacking miscommunication, I show an example below where Tom was trying to tease Phillip about his really short haircut:

WS310099.27.10.09 Haircut

- 3 Tom you got your hair cut.
- 4 Phil yes, my wife //
- 5 Tom // REALLY cut!
- 6 Phil my wife, yeah always.
- 7 Tom REA::LLY CUT!
- 8 Phil (laughs) yeah!
- 9 Tom did you-did your wife just close her eyes (closes his eyes) and
- 10 just (gestures as if cutting hair with garden shears)
- 11 until you don’t have any more hair? (laughs)

Phillip’s line 4, ‘yes, my wife’ can be interpreted as partial miscommunication. We can say that he might have misinterpreted Tom’s line 3 in the literal sense to mean ‘you cut your own hair.’ So his response is hearable as ‘yes I got my haircut but it was *not* me, it was my wife who cut it’, thus the added gloss, ‘my wife’ in Phillip’s line 4.

On the other hand, another interpretation is that there has been no miscommunication. Phillip's saying 'yes, my wife', is a way of adding new information instead of just giving a one-word answer 'yes.' In line 5, Tom emphasises REALLY CUT, disattending to the new information 'my wife' but getting Phillip to focus on the shortness of the cut so he could get on with the tease. But Phillip, who probably does not have any idea of what he was trying to get at, answers 'my wife, yeah always' (line 6). In line 9, Tom finally acknowledges the 'wife' and builds her into his tease (lines 9 to 11).

The 'haircut' example shows that the lines between communication and miscommunication are indeed fuzzy which underscores the importance of cooperation and collaboration between interlocutors to arrive at a negotiated meaning. Were Tom and Phillip aware that there might have been partial miscommunication between them? It is difficult to say; my interest though in this chapter is to explore miscommunication episodes where one or both interactants recognise the discrepancy in interpretation or understanding. This is consistent with my ethnographic perspective of trying to see things from the participant perspective, thus, this thesis is not concerned with miscommunication that the EPPI participants do not make salient or attend to. At this point, I narrow my definition of miscommunication to refer to communication incidents where there is a discrepancy in understanding or interpretation between the participants where at least one of the participants recognises and tries to repair. One way of recognising that a miscommunication has been made salient by at least one of the participants is by looking at the uptake in the next utterance. This uptake can take the form of reaction (such as silence, or confused look, paralinguistic signal) and repair (e.g. direct question, clarification request) to the utterance in question.

Linell (1995: 190) suggests five sequential structures in exploring miscommunication: 1. *core utterance*; 2. *reaction*; 3. *attempted repair*; 4. *reaction to*

repair; and 5. *exit*. The core utterance belongs to the main line of discourse activity before the miscommunication becomes manifest. We can view the core utterance as that utterance which may potentially trigger miscommunication. According to Linell (1995), the three stages : reaction; attempted repair; and reaction to repair ‘usually involve meta-comments and tend to form a side-sequence, a repair sequence starting with the allusion to or formulation of an understanding problem and continuing with the execution of some remedial action, often *jointly* performed’ (Linell 1995: 191, my emphasis). The exit stage refers to the resumption of the discourse prior to the miscommunication. In other words, a miscommunication episode can be viewed as having an entrance-complication-solution-exit structure: a speaker utters a potentially miscommunicative utterance (entrance), the hearer reacts verbally or non-verbally to signal a misunderstanding (complication), the speaker and hearer collaboratively work to reach negotiated understanding (solution) and then both participants resume previous discourse before the miscommunication (exit). The complication phase can be simple requiring only a one turn-repair or it can be more complex requiring an extended process of back and forth negotiation of meaning between speakers (*ibid*).

A major limitation of Linell’s framework is that it does not allow us to explore ‘proactive work’ (Mauranen 2006: 135) or the kind of preventative strategy that speakers deploy to prevent misunderstanding. In my data, there were many instances showing the three teachers doing proactive work which I would argue is very much tied to the pedagogical setting. Mauranen (2006: 135) claims that a striking feature of her *lingua franca* research was the use of preventative strategies such as confirmation checks and interactive repair. However, we need to consider the role of context – Mauranen’s data were taken from academic seminars and conferences where it is not surprising that speakers ensure that there is a common frame of reference before

carrying on with the talk. This may partially explain the findings in *lingua franca* research that misunderstandings are not very frequent. Indeed, the ‘anticipation of communicative difficulty may in itself offset much of the trouble, and speakers resort to proactive strategies’ (ibid: 123). Part of this anticipation of communicative difficulty, Mauranen claims, may also be manifested by an overt signalling of potential misunderstanding through asking direct questions, repeating the problematic item and indirect or unfocussed signalling of misunderstanding (e.g. hm?, what?). My data show that there is an overt explicitness to confirm that understanding has been achieved. Below is an example from my data between Kate and Phillip. Kate was doing an ‘unofficial’ activity with the class about colours and what they mean:

7 Kate so I'm going to name a colour and I want you to write down the name

8 of the first person you think of when you think of that colour.

9 Rach [xxx]

10 Kate [the first] person that you think of, so some names will

11 will pop into your head!

12 Phil first person HERE?

13 Kate no,

14 Phil no.

15 Kate any person. //

16 Phil // any person.

17 Kate that you know.

18 Phil okay,

19 Kate and they could be alive or not, somebody that you know or have

20 known okay, PERSONALLY //

21 Ss // okay

22 Kate that you know personally!

23 Phil okay.

Above, there is a noticeable confirmation of understanding through repetition of key lexical items ('first person' 'any person', 'that you know', and (dis)agreement ('no', 'okay'), as underlined in the excerpt. Kate's line 17, 19, 20 and 22 are very explicit emphasising that the name of the person that students should write on their paper should be the name of someone they know personally. Phillip clearly signals understanding in lines 14, 18 and 23.

In the example above, there is no 'core utterance' (in Linell's term) as such that precipitated a misunderstanding; what the excerpt highlights is the collaborative effort of both parties to prevent one. Another instance of preventing misunderstanding, initiated by a student, by asking for clarification is shown below. Tom tells the students that they should not 'pester' their work experience employer about whether or not the 20-week work placement is going to turn into a permanent job:

WS310165.20.11.09 Pester

988 Tom all he does is pester me about a job,

989 and I don't know what he's doing.

990 Jink oh no.

991 Tom right, and //

992 Vely // please?

993 Tom a PEST. you know like, annoying,

In line 992 Velyvet gives Tom an ambiguous signal (please?) that there was either a mishearing or linguistic misunderstanding. Although his 'please' is ambiguous, Tom gives a quick gloss on 'pest.' I categorize both examples above as 'proactive work' (Mauranen 2006) or preventative strategies to avoid miscommunication.

I find both Linell's and Mauranen's framework useful in exploring the nature of miscommunication in my data. Insights from both models allow us to put the interaction between participants at the centre of the analysis instead of attributing misunderstanding to individual actors.

6.2.3 What Miscommunication can do

It has been claimed that miscommunication can be 'a matter of transient annoyance or it can inhibit life-satisfaction, health, and healing' (Coupland et al. 1991: 3). It can lead to frustration, resentment and hurt feelings (Tzanne 2000). It can mean not getting the job one has interviewed for (Campbell and Roberts 2007), being perceived as rude and impolite (Gumperz 1982), and when one is misunderstood too often, it could lead to diminished self-esteem (Tannen 1984). Furthermore, in intercultural contexts, it has been argued that miscommunication at the level of conversation may lead to racial and ethnic stereotyping (Gumperz 2003).

Triggers to miscommunication in spoken discourse have been attributed to different factors – unclear expressions, mishearings, misperception of an utterance, misattributions of intentions to the interlocutor, divergent interactional and topical management strategies, knowledge gaps, noise, and physical environment (Linell 1995; Bazzanella and Damiano 1999; Tzanne 2000). In intercultural studies, miscommunication tends to be viewed as an inevitable consequence of cultural and linguistic differences. As Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez (2003: 301) claim, 'the ability to interpret a message is a direct function of the listener's home background, his peer group experiences and his education. Differences in background can lead to misinterpretation of messages'. Along the same lines, Gass and Varonis (1991: 122) point out that in interactions involving native speakers and non-native speakers of a

language, ‘the bridge is unstable if not downright shaky’ due to the difference of linguistic and sociocultural rules of discourse.

Since research on the negative aspect of miscommunication has already received much attention, I turn the spotlight on the ‘positive’ aspect of miscommunication which is often overlooked because of the common view that miscommunication is necessarily a negative thing (Poncini 2002). How is an observer to know whether or not something positive has been brought about by the miscommunication? An analyst who only captures a particular moment of the interaction and repair attempts may stop at the ‘exit’ stage whereby the speakers resume the topic under discussion before the miscommunication. A methodological point worth considering is that what gets labeled as miscommunication may depend to a large extent on the analyst’s time frame. It would be easy to overlook the positive dimension of a misunderstanding if the researcher only observes particular moments. I return to this point later and show how my role as a participant observer over an extended period of time enabled me to build into the analysis the interaction that took place after the miscommunication.

I argue, following Linell (1995), that some misunderstandings can be productive and can promote greater depth of understanding amongst the interactants. Coupland et al. (1991: 8) also contend that miscommunication can lead to positive and desirable outcomes. Indeed, based on my data, I illustrate how the process of negotiating meaning amongst the members of the EPPI enabled them to come to a more profound appreciation of each other’s views more than would have been the case had the misunderstanding not become salient. This is consistent with Wenger’s (1998: 83-84) view that ambiguity in communication can serve as an effective resource for mutual engagement. While lack of clarity and gaps in information or linguistic code can make coordination more time consuming, they also create opportune spaces for the

negotiation of meaning and mutually defining identities, and the convergence of feelings and attitudes. As Wenger states, it is only when they distract from mutual engagement that misunderstandings need to be addressed; they are not necessarily problems that need to be solved but can be turned into occasions for the creation of meaning. He further notes, ‘sustained engagement in shared practice is a dynamic form of coordination, one that generates “on the fly” the coordinated meanings that allow it to proceed’ (Wenger 1998: 84).

Simply put, the interactive process of repairing a misunderstanding can be a ‘vitalizing force’ (Coupland et al. 1991: 9) in the interaction. In the process of repairing a misunderstanding episode or negotiating new meanings, participants may come to realise that they have to rely on existing ‘attitudinal resources’ (Canagarajah 2006: 204-5) like patience, humility, tolerance and willingness to withstand ambiguity. Indeed, findings in ELF research confirm that pragmatic strategies learnt in the culture of origin serve as a useful resource when communicating across cultures (Seidlhofer 2004).

6.3 PREVENTING MISCOMMUNICATION

In this section I explore more examples of how the three teachers deployed proactive work to prevent miscommunication. I take a close look at how students and teachers ‘flag up’ potential problems (Wagner and Firth 1997: 325).

The extract below was when Kate was doing the ‘colour game’ with the students. She asked them to choose a name of a person that they associated with particular colours and then gave them an ‘interpretation’:

WS310114.30.10.09

White

53 Kate the second colour, orange is somebody (.) who's a TRUE friend.

54 so you can see if it holds true for you or not, WHITE

55 is someone that (2.0) this might be challenging (.) is somebody (.) that is
 56 a sou::lmate NOT necessarily erm (.) like erm like erm
 57 SPOUSE, or somebody you would like to to marry but somebody
 58 that you maybe you think alike, you know you have - there's
 59 a strong connection there, okay

In line 55, Kate clearly flagged up the word 'soulmate' with pauses before and after the phrase 'this might be challenging.' Notice that she started her definition with what soulmate is not (line 56-57, NOT necessarily erm (.) like erm like erm SPOUSE). My reading of this is that she was trying to make sure that the word 'mate' which might be known to the students does not confuse them as to the meaning of soulmate. Then in lines 58 and 59, she gives a gloss on soulmate (you think alike, strong connection).

The extract below shows Greg checking to make sure that the students knew what 'derogatory' meant (line 3). They were discussing hypothetical difficult situations in the workplace:

WS310091.21.10.09 Bad comment

1 Greg a co-visitor makes a derogatory comment about your work,
 2 what will your response be, what will - what will your response
 3 DEROGATORY what does that mean?
 4 (8.0)
 5 DEROGATORY (as he writes derogatory on the board)
 6 Greg who KNOWS derogatory?
 7 (3.0)
 8 Rach bad comment (very soft voice)
 9 Greg bad?
 10 Rach erm xxx

- 11 Greg pardon? //
- 12 Fai // comment!
- 13 Greg BAD COMMENT is that what you said? yeah! (addresses Rachana)

In line 8, Rachana gives a definition of derogatory but Greg hears only the first word ‘bad’, so he asks for a clarification in line 9. Rachana’s response in line 10 was unintelligible so Greg asks for further clarification (line 11). Faisal helps Rachana in line 12 by answering Greg’s query, so there is an element of collaboration here. In line 13, we see Greg confirming that ‘bad comment’ is what he meant by ‘derogatory.’

Below, I show two cases of near-misunderstanding prevented by Tom’s proactive work through confirmation checks:

WS310089.21.10.09 Pants in the family

- 26 Tom do you wear the pants in the family?
- 27 Vely no.
- 28 Tom NO! (laughs) you know what that means,
- 29 to wear the PANTS in the family?
- 30 Vely pardon me? //
- 31 Jink // to be the boss!
- 32 Vely OWWW (really?).(laughs)

In line 27, Velyvet answers ‘no’ to Tom’s question although he does not seem to understand the idiom, which can be considered as a case of ‘let it pass’, short for ‘let some socially inappropriate moves pass’ (Firth 1996: 243). But Tom’s reaction and confirmation check ‘NO! you know what that means, to wear the PANTS in the family?’ (lines 28, 29) and Jinky’s explanation in line 31 ‘to be the boss’ made it impossible for Velyvet to continue to ‘let it pass’. In line 32, his surprised reaction confirms that he did not know what the idiom meant and yet he tried to ‘let it pass.’

The next example below, illustrates Elias trying to ‘let it pass’ but Tom persists to ensure that the meaning is clear:

WS310026.30.09.09

Chicken and egg

- 1 Tom first of all, let's do a CHICKEN and EGG thing here,
2 a chicken and egg thing! you guys erm
3 should we do a CHICKEN and EGG thing? (2.0) chicken and egg?
4 Eli yeah.
5 Ss (laugh)
6 Tom (smiles) yeah! yeah! (laughs) I'm just gonna say YU::P!
(in a teasing voice)
7 Ss (laugh)
8 Tom o::kay, chicken and egg (3.0) what does that mean?
9 Eli chicken and egg, (in a smiley, teasing voice)//
10 Tom // chicken and egg,
11 Fai [which one is first]
12 Jink [which came]
13 Fai which came first
14 Tom which is first! that's right!
15 so we're gonna PRIORITISE, you know PRIORITISE

In lines 1 to 3, Tom does proactive work – he repeats ‘chicken and egg’ four times, the last two times being in the interrogative form. In line 4, Elias’s ‘yeah’ seems insufficient to convince Tom that he knew what it meant. In line 8, we get confirmation that Tom does not simply want a yes or no answer but a definition. He repeats ‘chicken and egg’ and waits for an answer signalled by a three-second pause. When he does not get a response, he asks a more explicit question (what does that mean). Elias just repeats

‘chicken and egg’ in line 9 which is obviously not the answer Tom is looking for. This is confirmed in line 10 where he repeats ‘chicken and egg’. Finally Faisal and Jinky (lines 11 to 13) rescue Elias and give the answer that Tom is looking for. In lines 11 to 13, we see Faisal and Jinky engaged in co-construction of the utterance ‘which came first.’ Initially Faisal says ‘which one is first’ while Jinky says ‘which came’. When Faisal reformulates the expression, he combines both his and Jinky’s words into ‘which came first.’ Line 15 where Tom says ‘so we’re gonna PRIORITISE’ is curious. While the expression generally refers to situations where it is impossible to say which of two things caused the other to happen, Tom seems to have used the ‘which came first – the chicken or the egg’ philosophical dilemma to mean ‘which of these things should we do first.’

Although Elias above, and Velyvet in the previous example tried to ‘let it pass’ Tom chose not to let them which shows how the pedagogic nature of the interaction contributes to the enactment of proactive work in talk. It is important to recognise the mutually shaping relationship between context and talk – an aspect often missed in ELF studies because the focus is on the ‘lingua’ as detached from the context.

I asked Elias if he knew the meaning of ‘chicken and egg’ and he said he did not, at least not in the sense of ‘to prioritise.’ He said that his understanding of ‘chicken and egg’ referred to a process where people discuss a topic at length without satisfactory output or results. In this sense, we can interpret Elias’s vague replies to Tom as attempts to save face with an element of playfulness.

The proactive work that teachers do to achieve a working level of understanding can be seen as a form of ‘perspective taking’ or ‘empathic accuracy’ (Holtgraves 2002: 149) where the speakers design their utterances to account for what they perceive as limitations in shared (linguistic) common ground. According to Holtgraves (ibid) being

able to take another person's perspective is essential in intercultural communication and can bring about positive effects on social relations. What the four examples of proactive work above have in common is that they generally conform to the IRF/IRE model which is typical of teacher-led discourse. In the three-part exchange, the teacher starts by asking a question, the students give an answer and then in the final move (evaluation or follow up) the teacher indicates whether or not the answer is satisfactory. Since the teachers know the correct answer to their questions, they can guide the students into the type of answer that they are looking for. In this way, it can be said that the three-part exchange (and its variations, i.e. I-R-I-F/E or I-I-R-R-F) provides a safeguard to ensuring mutual understanding between teachers and students. The model also allows for collaboration between students until the teacher validates the correctness of the negotiated answer. We have seen how this joint R (response/reply) worked in the above examples with Jinky and Faisal co-constructing an utterance. In the next extract, however, I show that proactive work can backfire, thus causing the misunderstanding that it was supposed to prevent. Below, Greg tries to elicit the meaning of the word 'acronym' starting his initiating move at line 1.

WS3100137.09.11.09 roygbiv

- 1 Greg there's nothing tricky to it - it's an acronym, right? what's an acronym?
- 2 Harl one word for so many words. (in a soft voice)
- 3 Greg ahh, what's scuba mean? scuba? what does that mean?
- 4 Ss (3.0)
- 5 Greg scuba? scooby dooby doo you guys watch scooby dooby doo?
- 6 Ss (subdued laughter)
- 7 Greg it's not that!
- 8 Ss (laugh)

9 Greg scuba!

10 Harl it's a diving, scuba diving?

11 Greg Self (.) Contained (.) Underwater (.) Breathing (.)Apparatus //

12 Vely // really?

13 Greg roygbiv (writes it on board). that's my next door neighbour (.) NOT!

14 so what does that one mean? what if I wrote it instead of horizontally,

15 I wrote it vertically! (writes vertically) and then if I told you there's a

16 POT at the end of it, HUH! (sounds shocked)

17 you guys DON'T know THAT? no POT at the end of it?

18 S ro::ygbiv (in a whisper)

19 Greg COME ON! AND NOW, there's a POT at the END OF IT! Of GOLD!

20 Ss (3.0)

21 Greg red, orange, (starts drawing a rainbow on the board),

22 [yellow, green blue indigo and VIOLET!]

23 Ss [oh yeah yeah]

24 Harl vibgyor! vibgyor!

25 Greg and there's a POT of GOLD at the end of the rainbow!

26 Fai rainbow, rainbow!

27 Harl it's vibgyor!

28 Fai rainbow, rainbow!

Although Harleen's reply in line 2 'one word for so many words' seems to be a good enough approximation of what an acronym is, Greg's reaction in line 3 'ahh' is ambiguous. His next utterance 'what's scuba mean' makes it evident that he is not accepting Harleen's answer as the correct one. In lines 5, 7 and 9, he tries to elicit a definition for scuba in a light-hearted manner, 'scooby dooby doo you guys watch

scooby dooby doo?’(line 5) which is probably intended to lessen the face threat to the students. He gives the correct answer in line 11 then continues on to line 13 to elicit what the letters in ‘roygbiv’ stand for. He makes another light-hearted utterance ‘that’s my next door neighbour (.) NOT.’ He seems shocked that the students could not give him the correct answer in spite of the clues – first the ‘pot’, and then the ‘pot of gold at the end of it’. It becomes clear to the students that ‘roygbiv’ stands for the colours of the rainbow when Greg starts drawing a rainbow on the white board. Apparently, roygbiv is a mnemonic for the colours of the rainbow, from top to bottom (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet).

What makes the above example a fertile site for analysis is that there were several things going on in the interaction. Greg used humour perhaps as face threat mitigation and to make searching for the correct answer a fun activity for the students. However, the clues that he gave were not part of the students’ world knowledge. They did not know who Scooby doo was. Roygbiv as an acronym was very context-specific to the Canadian educational setting. Most people who attended primary school in Canada may be familiar with ‘roygbiv’ as memory aid for learning the colours of the rainbow. But even if the EPPI students were familiar with mnemonics, they would have learnt the colours of the rainbow in their own native languages; thus, the acronym would differ. In Harleen’s case, although she learnt the acronym for the colours of the rainbow in English, the arrangement of the letters differ: it was ‘vibgyor’ (violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow orange, red.) instead of ‘roygbiv,’ or the colours of the rainbow seen from the bottom up. Furthermore, I found out during my interviews with the students that the idea of ‘pot of gold at the end of the rainbow’ was not part of their world knowledge. This may be a specific instance where differences of culture-related knowledge interfere with efficient communication, that is, if we view culture as set of

learnt practices, knowledge and belief shared by a group of people. By this I do not necessarily mean ‘national’ culture in the traditional sense but it may also have to do with educational culture.

6.4 SOCIAL AND INTERPERSONAL FUNCTIONS OF MISCOMMUNICATION

6.4.1 Failed Jokes as a Vitalizing Force

In this sub-section I take a look at humour (e.g. jokes, riddles) in the computer class. Humour, as discussed in the two previous chapters, characterizes the EPPI participants’ sustained mutual engagement and shared ways of doing things. But what if the intended humour does not succeed in producing laughter on the part of the listener because of lexical gaps or pragmatic differences? Jokes in particular may be susceptible to misunderstanding because they are ‘based on mutual shared background knowledge and values,’ and therefore may be deployed by the speaker to emphasise or invoke those shared background and values (Brown and Levinson 1987: 124).

The next three examples I analyse are joking examples, defined here as a riddle, anecdote or short story aimed to produce laughter or amusement. The extracts were taken from the computer class. As mentioned earlier, the computer class was designed to be self-paced so there was little teacher-fronted instruction. Kate encouraged a friendly and social atmosphere in the classroom where unofficial talk co-existed harmoniously with the on-going official activity.

In the extract below, Kate tells Faisal to tell her if he has managed to change his log-in password. Elias joins the discussion as soon as he heard the words ‘tell us’ in Kate’s utterance:

- 16 Kate when you - when you get it changed you tell us okay?
- 17 Fai okay, one day I'll talk to them.
- 18 Kate yeah, because we want to know.
- 19 (Elias motions to Kate. Kate walks over to where Elias is sitting.)
- 21 Kate hello Elias,
- 22 Eli oh just I say - I would like to say (.) when erm whatever happens,
- 23 TELus or Rogers?¹²
- 24 Kate to what? (looks puzzled)
- 25 Eli wh-what happens Telus or Rogers?
- 26 Kate what happens to? (.) (xxx) - I didn't get it I'm sorry
- 27 Mab (laughs)
- 28 Eli you say, you say whatever happens, tell us, I say Telus or Rogers
- 29 Kate tell us, yes
- 30 Eli I say Telus or Rogers,
- 31 Kate okay, okay tell us (2.0)
- 32 Eli did you did you get it?
- 33 Kate tell us anyway?
- 34 Eli no, Telus or Rogers
- 35 Kate I- I- I don't understand the last word,
- 36 Eli ROGERS
- 37 Kate can you spell that for me?
- 38 Eli yeah! R-o-g-e-r-s!
- 39 Kate oh Rogers!

¹¹ Telus is a telecommunications company in Canada.

¹² Rogers is another telecommunications company which is a direct competitor of Telus.

- 40 Eli yeah!
- 41 Kate okay, all right. (.) I don't understand but that's okay.
- 42 Eli (laughs quietly) okay, I explain to you,
- 43 Kate o::kay,
- 44 Eli so you said tell us,
- 45 Telus we have the company Telus and we have Rogers!
- 46 Telus! [so Rogers Telus]
- 47 Kate [o::h JOKE!]
- 48 Eli xxx? //
- 49 Kate // Telus, Rogers, oh FUNNY man! (laughs)
- 50 Eli so you get it now?
- 51 Kate I DO get it now! (laughs)

Building from Kate's utterance in line 16, 'whatever happens tell us,' Elias initiates a playful frame to create a double meaning (tell us/Telus). Using Linell's (1995) framework, we can say that the core utterance that precipitated the miscommunication are in lines 22 and 23 (oh just I say I would like to say (.) when erm whatever happens TELus or Rogers). Kate's reaction is that of puzzlement linguistically signalled by 'to what?' (line 24). Elias responds with an attempted repair in line 25 (what happens Telus or Rogers). Based on Kate's reaction to Elias's repair, it seems that she heard only the first part 'what happens to xxx' which I think is part of native speaker formulaic speech that when the phrase 'what happens' is uttered, it is usually followed by the preposition 'to.' So she reacts to Elias's repair with a meta-comment 'I didn't get it I'm sorry.' I laugh in line 27 because I realised that Elias was trying to set up a humourous play on words – tell us and its homonym Telus. I understood the pun because I happened to be familiar with 'Rogers', which is Telus's biggest competitor in

the Canadian telecommunications industry. In lines 28 to 41, Kate and Elias go through a cycle of attempted repair then reaction to repair, then reaction to the reaction to repair and so on. Kate expresses what is hearable as exasperation in line 41 (okay, all right. (.) I don't understand but that's okay). A more plausible interpretation is an attempt to save her face and Elias's. By continuing with the repair, Kate risks either annoying Elias or giving him the impression that he is not a very competent joke teller. The asymmetrical relationship between teacher and student, between native speaker and non-native speaker all contribute to the sensitivity of repairing miscommunicative episodes. But Elias, line 42, insists on explaining the intended humour in the word play, which he does in lines 44 to 46. Even before he finishes his explanation, Kate (in line 47 'o::h JOKE!') realises the intended humour and makes explicit her understanding in line 49 'Telus, Rogers, oh FUNNY man!' and then laughs. In lines 50 and 51 both parties concur that the misunderstanding has been successfully repaired.

What is worth mentioning at this point is the fact that Elias had told the tell us/Telus joke¹³ to Tom, two weeks earlier. Tom 'got' the joke after a series of attempted repairs and explanations. In that episode, Elias also made a play on the words 'tell us' and 'Telus' as soon as he heard Tom use the words 'tell us' as part of an utterance in class. At that time, Elias contrasted Telus with 'Koodo' which is another Canadian telecommunications company, a competitor of Telus. But Tom interpreted Koodo as 'kudos' so there was a misunderstanding and a series of repairs. So in the retelling of the joke with Kate, it can be assumed that Elias changed Koodo to Rogers in order to prevent the same type of misunderstanding that he had with Tom. This indicates that he used the failed joke with Tom as a learning opportunity. Although his 'revised' joke was initially misunderstood by Kate, its rapport and solidarity function was clearly

¹³ I am not using joke as a technical linguistic term but using it based on participant's perspective. In the tell us/Telus episode, Kate calls it a 'joke.'

conveyed. This interpretation seems plausible as will be shown in the next extract as Kate responds with her own brand of joke.

After the tell us/Telus misunderstanding above, Elias and Kate had a brief exchange about something else. Kate left Elias to attend to another student but returned a few minutes later:

WS310058.30.09.09

Smells like blue paint

- 97 Kate I have a good one for you Elias!
- 98 Eli yeah,
- 99 Kate what is (.) red and smells like blue paint?
- 100 Eli what is red, (coughs)
- 101 Kate what is red and smells like blue paint?
- 102 Eli what?
- 103 Kate BLUE paint.
- 104 Eli blue PINK?
- 105 Kate blue PAINT, paint you know when you [paint] (makes painting gestures)
- 106 Eli [yeah yeah]
- 107 PAINT, yeah PAINT!
- 108 Kate yeah.
- 109 Eli (3.0) e::rm er::m (looks up, as if thinking of the answer)
- 110 Kate (laughs) RED paint!
- 111 Eli (laughs) okay yeah one one point one for one, one for one

Although the tell us/Telus joke did not go over smoothly, it appears that Kate has recognised its social function as she tries to re-create a similar play frame with Elias (line 97). In line 99, Kate gives her riddle ‘what is red and smells like blue paint?’ which serves as the core utterance. Elias (line 100) reacts by trying to repeat the

question, interrupted by coughing, which ‘flags’ (Wagner and Firth 1997: 325) a potential problem in understanding. Kate repeats the question in line 101 but Elias still seems unclear (line 102, what?). Kate tries another repair ‘BLUE paint’ in line 103. There is obviously no need for her to repeat the first part of the question because Elias has already signalled in line 100 that he heard it (what is red). In line 104, Elias mishears paint (blue PINK) to which Kate offers a quick repair (blue PAINT) with an accompanying ‘painting’ gesture. It took several turns of repair for Kate to clarify mishearings before Elias demonstrates non-verbally that he has understood enough to guess the right answer (line 109). When Kate gives the punchline ‘RED paint!’ in line 110, Elias laughs and says ‘okay yeah one one point one for one, one for one’ (line 111). He is referring to the Telus joke as one point for him and the paint joke as one point for Kate.

The side-sequences of reactions and attempted repairs show the collaborative work that Kate and Elias invested to achieve understanding. In Norrick’s (2007: 391) terms, they used accommodation strategies - repeating misheard words, making ‘painting’ gestures, and requesting clarification - to come to a point where they reached sufficient understanding to enjoy a good laugh together.

The attempted jokes above can be interpreted as having failed by the mere fact that they needed explaining. But the jokes can be assumed to have achieved some success in terms of creating team. Just like the Telus/tell us joke, there was some laughter, albeit delayed. The extract below was taken four weeks after the extracts above. Kate tries her hand at telling a humorous riddle:

WS310114.30.10.09 Why are frogs so happy?

- 1 Kate do you guys know why frogs are so happy?
- 2 Rach frog?

- 3 Kate yeah! (.) Why are frogs so happy?
- 4 Mab (laughs quietly)
- 5 Phil (laughs in an embarrassed way)
- 6 Kate any idea?
- 7 Phil n::o,
- 8 Rach xxx (sounds?) (sounds?)
- 9 Fais what what is that?
- 10 Kate why are FROGS so happy?
- 11 (2.0)
- 12 Fais xxx what time?
- 13 Kate no, just anytime (.)
- 14 Rach [(jump?)]
- 15 Phil [(laughs)]
- 16 Kate because because they eat what BUGS them (.)
- 17 Phil a::hh.
- 18 Rach o::kay,
- 19 Kate because they EAT what BUGS them!
- 20 Phil yeah,

Rachana's reaction in line 2 (frog?) to Kate's core utterance in line 1 (do you guys know why are frogs are so happy?) indicates that she has not recognised the cue in the play frame Kate is trying to create. My reaction in line 4 shows that I have recognised the riddle schema although I did not know the answer. By line 10, Kate has delivered her supposed one-liner three times already without successful uptake. Rachana still seems unaware of what is going on (lines 8, 14). Faisal, likewise, has not picked up the joking frame and asks 'what time' in line 12 to which Kate answers 'just

anytime' (line 13). Kate finally gives the solution to the riddle: 'because because they eat what BUGS them' (line 16). But Phillip's and Rachana's reaction to the punch line is ambiguous so she repeats it in line 19. Still, no overt reaction from the group except for Phillip who responds with 'yeah' (line 20).

In lines 21 to 51 below, we see Kate and the students trying to unpack the riddle, choosing not to 'let it pass'. A lexical gap is slowly revealed: the students do not seem to know the double meaning of the word 'bug' (as a noun referring to any small insects, and as a verb meaning 'to annoy' or 'to irritate') which was the crux of the riddle. Notice that Kate has not offered any synonyms or explanation of what a bug is; otherwise the point of the joke will be lost.

- 21 Fai they eat WHAT? //
- 22 Kate // BUGS them.
- 23 Fai b-bugs? what bugs?
- 24 Kate bug (.) frogs eat bugs.
- 25 Vely but [now what do] they xxx
- 26 Fai [bugs o::h bugs]
- 27 Kate BUGS, b-u-g-s //
- 28 Fai // bugs?
- 29 Kate yeah.
- 30 Vely but now what do they bug?
- 31 Rach what?
- 32 Vely why?
- 33 Kate why?
- 34 Vely what? what? (.)
- 35 Rach wh-what?//

36 Phil // what do they eat?

37 Vely yes, what what do they eat yes, you can say that, what do they eat?

38 Kate what do they eat.

39 Vely yes,

40 Kate BUGS!

41 Vely bugs (laughs)!

42 Rach ahhh (whispery voice)

43 Phil yeah (in a soft voice)

44 Fai bu::gs.

45 Kate but, but //

46 Vely // it's funny,

47 Kate yeah in in English if something BUGS you, it ANNOYS you.

48 Vely yes.

49 Kate yeah.

50 ?? (subdued laughter)

51 Kate so it's a play on words (9.0).

52 Phil hmmmnnn

In line 51, above, Kate gives a meta-comment 'so it's a play on words' to explain what she has just tried to do. There was no overt reaction from the students, except ambiguous silence for about nine seconds until Phillip says 'hmmmnnn' (line 52) which serves to fill the uncomfortable silence.

The 'frog' example illustrates that misunderstandings can and do occur in spite of participants' repair efforts and interactive communication strategies such as asking specific questions, repetition of problematic items, indirect signalling (e.g. yeah, hmmmnnn) and self repair (Mauranen 2006). It is worth noting that the students do not

simply ‘flag’ up a potential misunderstanding. They were displaying curiosity and attempting to make sense of why the joke does not make sense, at least from their perspective.

The ‘frog’ riddle may be considered to have failed in the sense that the desired reaction (laughter or amusement) did not come about due to linguistic constraints and the non-recognition of the joking script or playful frame. As Norrick (1993: 142) claims, humour relies on how speakers set up their actions as either serious or play; once the hearers realise that the speaker is creating a play frame, then whatever the speakers say will likely elicit laughter. In the ‘frog’ example, the play frame has not been established so the students were ‘serious’. The interrogative form of the riddle seems to have been interpreted literally as a question-answer adjacency pair instead of a ‘question-question joke pair’ (e.g. A: why are frogs so happy?; B: why?). In other words, the contextualization cue (Gumperz 1982) that says ‘this is play’ was not inferred by the students as such. When I asked Jinky and Velyvet, after the class to find out what they thought of the riddle, they said that it was funny but they did not realise initially that Kate had intended to tell a riddle.

While an unsuccessful attempt to elicit laughter at humour can cause humiliation for the instigator (Bell 2009), the effect for the listener might be that of embarrassment, discomfort or a sense of guilt for not ‘getting it.’ One way to handle the awkward moment is to get on with whatever topic was being talked about before the failed joke or ‘exit’ phase in Linell’s framework. But as we see below, neither Kate nor the students seem to be ready for an ‘exit’, which may signal a strong desire to ensure that no face has been threatened and that the harmonious social relations are maintained. Kate and the students, still resisting to ‘let it pass,’ transform the failed joke into an opportunity to reflect on what has happened and to make sense of the relationship

between language learning and culture. Notice how the participants do a meta-discussion on jokes:

- 53 Kate I was in a class one time on languages and they said that when you start
54 to understand the JOKES, in a LANGUAGE,
55 Phil yeah,
56 Kate that means you're starting to erm to get a good handle on the language
57 because you can understand the jokes
58 (4.0)
59 Vely sometimes why it's difficult people when people
60 they say something but you cannot understand
61 what they are saying and all people they LAUGH //
62 Rach // without knowing!
63 Vely (laughs)
64 Kate [yeah]
65 Vely [it's terrible!] (still laughing)

Kate seems to be implying in lines 53, 54, 56 and 57 that the students do not have a 'good handle' yet on the English language. She hedges her comment by using 'they said' in line 53. In Goffman's (2001) terms, she is taking an animator stance which distances her from the utterance. The four-second pause in line 58, an uncomfortable silence, belongs to the next speaker, not Kate who has had a turn. Velyvet gives a subtle, indirect explanation on why the joke did not generate laughter (line 59); he signals this by emphasising the word 'LAUGH' in line 61, which was co-constructed with Rachana (line 62). Velyvet, like Kate, signals his concern for face mitigation by using 'people' and the third person pronoun 'they.' Using an animator stance, he also distances himself from the utterance. Velyvet's response shows

sophistication as he mirrors Kate's stance thus achieving rhythm and alignment in the interaction.

What immediately follows, below, is a discussion of how misunderstanding can happen even amongst native speakers of a language:

- 66 Kate for example if I were to talk to somebody
67 who just came from Newfoundland,
68 which is a province in Canada,
69 I would have a very difficult time understanding
70 what they're saying
71 even though we're both speaking English
72 because they have different meanings
73 for the words (.) and because it's a it's a different culture,
74 because it's an island and fishing is a big thing
75 so a lot of their cultures (.) their language is around
76 the WATER and the FISHING industry,
77 and their lifestyle which is different than HERE
78 so they can say something and and for them
79 it means something and I'm going WHAT?
80 I remember talking xxx many many years ago
81 from (.) Ontario (.) and he used to say oh look
82 at that knoll over there! and I'm going WHAT?
83 what you talking [about and]
84 Phil [xxx]
85 Kate he's talking about a HILL, because KNOLL, k-n-o-l-l (spells the word)
86 is a very OLD word for HILL! so he would say look at the knoll

87 and I'm going what are you what are you talking about?

88 Phil (laughs)

89 Vely and he was talking in [English]

90 Kate [in English]

91 Vely Phillip, in French? not really!

92 Phil erm Quebec and France

93 Kate their French is different!

94 Vely they are close!

95 Phil yeah yeah yes yes

96 in Quebec, they kept the OLD, OLD French //

97 Kate // hmmm

98 Phil some they - they have trouble when they go to France,

99 Kate okay,

100 Phil yeah, Quebec people

101 Vely xxx

Above, lines 66 to 90 demonstrate how the failed ‘frog’ joke has generated a robust discussion between Kate, Velyvet and Phillip. In lines 66 to 90, Kate talks about how people from another Canadian province, Newfoundland use some English lexical items that she does not understand. She attributes this to differences in culture and lifestyle (lines 73 to 74). Velyvet, a native speaker of Haitian French extends the topic of ‘same language, different meanings’ in line 91 when he asks Phillip, a speaker of French and Lingala, if it is the same situation in French. Phillip says that people who speak Quebecois French ‘have trouble when they go to France’ (line 98) because people from Quebec ‘kept the OLD OLD French’ (line 96). Note that Kate has previously emphasised the word ‘old’ in line 86 (is a very OLD word for HILL!) when trying to

make sense of the differences in lexical usage, which demonstrates the coherence of the talk as well as the speakers' alignment with each other (Nofsinger 1991: 111).

In line 102 below, Phillip, maintains the coherence of the discussion. He starts with a delayed clarification request (yeah but when you say from HERE). The 'here' refers to Kate's utterance in line 77 (and their lifestyle which is different than here). Phillip, lines 102 and 104, asks for a geographical clarification:

- 102 Phil yeah but when you say from HERE, from Ontario to //
- 103 Kate // to here
- 104 Phil to BC? same accent? from Ontario to BC the same English,
- 105 the same words?

Kate then explains that Newfoundland, a part of the Maritimes, is different from the other parts of Canada 'because the Maritimes are much older.' She relates a personal experience of working with people from Newfoundland who have different accents and use words that identify them as not being 'from here.' In fact, Kate uses the word 'here' in her response to Phillip's question over several utterances which can be interpreted as maintaining a tight grip on coherence ensuring that she and Phillip are talking about the same thing. There is a texture of explicitness in her reply: not only does she use personal examples, she animates her utterances with direct voicing (...and I go 'you're not from here' in line 116; I would go 'you're not from here' in line 121; if I were to go there, they would go 'whatcha talkin' bout?' in line 127). Her explicitness serves to prevent misunderstanding and ensure coherence; it also shows her cooperative intent to accommodate. Every effort seems to be exerted in order to prevent the awkwardness of the previous 'frog' miscommunication.

- 106 Kate erm (.), mostly yes, the Maritimes are different
- 107 because the Maritimes are much older,

108 Phil Yes

109 Kate they've been settled longer and so I think they use erm well, I worked

110 with a couple of people (.) from Newfoundland

111 in in xxx when I was working in the North and,

112 they definitely have a very strong accent, they use different [words for]

113 Phil [hmmm]

114 Kate the same thing I mean they have been here a long time so they

115 their language is - has adjusted has adjusted

116 but even so, they say things and I go (.) you're not from here (laughs)

117 Phil (laughs)

118 Kate xxx here (.) my my boss up there had been in the province

119 for fourTEEN years and STILL, he would say some words

120 Phil yes,

121 Kate and I would go you're not from here, because INTrest!

122 Ss (laugh)

123 Kate INTrest! (different accent)

124 Vely Phillip?

125 Ss (laugh)

126 Kate no no you're not from here and that's okay I mean I'm I'm sure they think

127 I talk funny. if I were to go there, they would go whatcha talkin bout?

128 Ss (laugh)

The point in including the rather lengthy exchange between Kate and Phillip (with laughter reactions from the other students) is to show how the 'frog' misunderstanding has generated meaningful discussions in the group. Other identities were also explored as Kate makes salient her identity as a native of Canada and the

students as newcomers to the country. In making misunderstanding the main topic of the conversation, they were making ‘misunderstanding’ acceptable and normal. In fact there was a ‘celebratory’ (Aston 1993: 240) feel to the discussion, hearable as ‘see, we’re talking and understanding each other.’ The argument I wish to put forward is that the joking miscommunication has led to a positive and fruitful outcome for the speakers who transformed a potentially embarrassing and face threatening situation into an opportunity for mutual engagement. The notion that something positive can come out of what might be viewed as negative is also exemplified in Aston’s (1993: 226) study of shop encounters. It was observed that customers and service assistants tended to engage in an interactional (as opposed to transactional) chat when the goods that the customers were looking for were unavailable. It is claimed that the interactional chat seemed to make the transactional failure more acceptable. Furthermore, it can be argued that the fact that the joke failed to elicit laughter did not dilute its original intention which was to claim common ground (Brown & Levinson 1987) and create team (Holmes and Marra 2004). The participants not only expanded their *established* common ground (Lee 2001), they seemed to have had fun in the process. Perhaps it is precisely because the joke has failed that has transformed it into a ‘vitalizing force’ and a readily available resource (Brown and Rogers 1991: 162) for mutual engagement.

It needs pointing out that my data collection method of participant observation enabled me to capture the positive and ‘vitalizing’ consequences of the ‘frog’ miscommunication. Had I not followed the trajectory of the talk after the failed riddle, I would have missed its interactional import for the participants. I return to this point later and discuss methodological implications in the Conclusion section of this chapter

6.4.2 Miscommunication and Protecting Common Ground

In this section, I look at two extracts: ‘white underwear’, and ‘I did a mistake;’ the former was a joke gone wrong (in hindsight, at least from the perspective of the joke teller), and the latter was an apology from the person whose joke was either misunderstood or was considered inappropriate.

The extract below was taken just before Faisal was to go for an employment interview in a chemical laboratory. As part of the usual classroom practice, the students offer some tips on how to do well at the interview:

WS310057.30.09.09

White underwear

- 5 Tom right! okay, Elias, yes? (calls on Elias)
- 6 Eli I just erm I have an idea for (laughs)
- 7 Tom UH-o::h
- 8 Eli (still laughing) because
- 9 that he should know (.) wear a white underwear (2.0) (laughs)
- 10 Jink wear what? sorry?
- 11 Tom [no::oh]
- 12 Jink [I missed that] I missed that
- 13 Eli (laughing)
- 14 Jink what's that?
- 15 Eli because it is medical (.) and supposed to be in WHITE
- 16 in WHITE, okay, I- I //
- 17 Jink // I see! because la::b! (laughs) so, (laughs)
- 18 Eli I'm sorry (laughs) but lab, (laughs)
- 19 Jink uh -huh (laughs)
- 20 Eli (still laughing)

Elias, above, starts laughing (line 6) even before he finishes his core utterance. Tom reacts in line 7 (UH-o::h) which indicates that he has inferred Elias's laughter as a contextualization cue that the forthcoming utterance would be non-serious. Elias could barely finish his sentence (lines 8 and 9) without laughing. Jinky, flags a mishearing and asks for clarification in lines 10, 12 and 14. It seems that Elias's fits of laughter were making it difficult for her to understand his utterance. Another interpretation is that although Jinky has heard the 'white underwear' part correctly, she wants to make sure that she heard correctly. This interpretation is plausible because of the unexpectedness of the 'white underwear' advice which does not match the seriousness of preparing for a job interview. Tom disaligns himself from Elias's suggestion in line 11 (no::h). As reaction to Jinky's clarification request, Elias attempts a repair in line 15 and 16 (because it is medical (.) and supposed to be in WHITE in WHITE). Since Faisal was applying for a laboratory facility, Elias assumed that he would need to wear a white laboratory coat, thus the justification for the white underwear to match the colour of the laboratory coat. Jinky confirms acceptance of repair in line 17 (I see! because la::b!) accompanied by laughter.

As the discussion continues below, (lines 21 to 32) we see varied reactions to Elias's 'white underwear' suggestion. Tom continues to disaffiliate himself from Elias; he mitigates disapproval through humour (lines 24 and 25, let the RECORD show that I put my head down and shook my head). Jinky, in collaboration with Rachana (lines 29 and 31), is not only amused but seems to rejoice in the discovery of Elias's funny side in lines 26 to 28, 'the first time that I - we met Elias, I never think that she - he's like THAT I thought that he was so SERIOUS'.

21 Tom let the - let the //

22 Vely // Elias,

23 Jink [you know what?] you know what?

24 Tom [let the RECORD show] that I put my head down

25 and shook my head (laughs)

26 Jink you know what? the first time that I - we met Elias,

27 I never think that she - he's like THAT I thought

28 that he was so SERIOUS that y-you are not allowed to//

29 Rach // he's very silent //

30 Jink // he's very silent guy (laughs)

31 Rach xxx not able to speak too much,

32 Jink yes! (laughs)

Faisal, the subject of the 'white underwear' advice has been silent all along except for lines 33 and 37 below:

33 Fai and now it's too much (very softly spoken).

34 Vely yes.

35 Tom ok, all right, so Faisal do you have a checklist of what you need to do? //

36 Eli // and the last point?

37 Fai YOU have CONFIDENCE on me!

38 Tom awesome! all right well GOOD job!

As will be revealed later, Faisal's lines 33 and 37 carry important signals regarding his perception of the unfolding event. He was indeed 'flagging' a potential problem which may have been drowned out by the laughter. Considering he was the 'butt of the joke' and the target recipient of the advice, his lack of active participation in the exchange is in itself loaded with meaning. Velyvet, line 34, only says one word (yes) but it shows solidarity and support for Faisal. I return to this in a later extract.

After line 38, Tom called for a 15-minute coffee break and left the room. Faisal got up from his seat, walked towards Elias and said:

- 43 Fai xxx, one fourth of the country you have to manage,
44 one FOURTH of the country, HERE we are NEW that's our problem
45 but we have MA::NY ABILITIES
46 xxx and you know xxx it is very difficult to manage that (.) okay?
 (in a forceful, aggressive voice; standing in front of Elias)
47 Eli Faisal (in a pleading voice) // (remains seated)
48 Fai // we are NOT a BOY, we are NOT a BABY! (.) (trembling voice)
49 Eli THAT is what I'm telling,
50 Fai We are not a BABY anymore (angry tone) //
51 Eli // that is what I'm telling
52 Fai xxx I have to make 1,000 questionnaire xxx, ONE THOUSAND!
53 Eli FAISAL - this - this is what I told this morning,
54 Fai okay? yeah?
55 Eli okay! //
56 Fai // I HAVE TO MAKE ONE THOU::SAND QUESTIONNAIRE!
57 Eli yeah, ONE THOUSAND, so xxx all the BEST for YOU
58 this is what I TOLD before //
59 Fai // it it is
60 Eli this morning //

Throughout the whole encounter above, Faisal stood in front of Elias who remained seated during the interaction. His voice was much louder than his normal way of speaking. He was visibly very upset - his whole body trembled while he spoke and he wagged his index finger at Elias.

Based on Faisal's line 43-46 (one fourth of the country you have to manage, one FOURTH of the country, HERE we are NEW that's our problem but we have MA::NY ABILITIES xxx and you know xxx it is very difficult to manage that (.) okay?) and line 48 (we are NOT a BOY, we are NOT a BABY!) it can be argued that telling him what colour underwear to wear in an interview might have been construed as demeaning. It should be noted that Faisal had the highest educational level of all the students, with a PhD from a UK university. Before he immigrated to Canada he was in charge of one of the most high profile government ministries in his country. In line 52, when he mentioned the one thousand questionnaires, he was referring to a huge research project that he successfully ran in his country – this was common knowledge amongst the students. Although he used '1,000 questionnaires' as a shorthand expression to talk about his previous project, I was able to recover what it indexes because I was present in the discussion when he talked about his responsibilities at the ministry in the first week of the class. I return to this point in the summary.

Elias's reaction to Faisal's utterances shows alignment and acknowledgment (line 49, 'THAT is what I'm telling;' line 51, 'that is what I'm telling;' line 53, 'this this is what I told this morning'). Thus by using the strategies, 'avoiding disagreement' and 'seeking agreement,' he is claiming common ground through shared perspective, shared attitude and empathy (Brown and Levinson 1987). I argue that the way Elias deploys claiming common ground as a strategy has a restorative and repair quality to it which is intended to defuse and manage the conflict. As the interaction continues, below, Faisal asserts that there are no other barriers to finding a job except language and culture. His mention of 'telephone' (lines 62 and 63) refers to the mock phone calls that the group had to do earlier that morning. Continuing his claim for common ground as a conflict management device, Elias reassures him that they belong to the same set of persons who

not only share the same beliefs and ideas, but also common struggles when it comes to language and culture (lines 68, 71, 72, 74, 77, 78). His line 68 'I agree with you a hundred percent' is a very explicit attempt at keeping the common ground intact. Indeed, he deploys claiming common ground as a conflict management strategy.

- 61 Fai // but here the CULTURE and information and
62 before talking on telephone and because we have to
63 talk so:: MUCH in telephone sometimes it's xxx but
64 here because language and other things is a little bit and culture THIS IS
65 the ONLY problem NOTHING else
66 Eli [you see]
67 Fai [we are too] much xxx to HANDLE the people!
68 Eli I agree with you a hundred percent
69 Fai understand? you are there even I working there so we have to, to
70 xxx people is there! //
71 Eli // this is the point this is what I told not our skills, NOT our ABILITIES
72 the problem or not the [problem]
73 Vely [the culture]
74 Eli we need to learn the SMA::LL things about the new culture
75 Vely yeah,
76 Fai yes.
77 Eli this this is what I told this morning it should not - this is - this this little
78 learning about the culture xxx I never - affect our trust in ourselves

Above, Velyvet joins in the interaction (line 73, the culture), overlapping with Elias, and line 75 (yeah). He has been present during the whole interaction. In line 76 (yes), Faisal aligns with both Elias and Velyvet by agreeing that culture, not skills or

abilities are the problem. At this point, the appeal to common ground (as in-group membership, relational identity, shared feelings and attitudes) seems to have served its restorative function. With the three students strategically 'taking the stance of fellow-outlaws,' facing the same challenges in the Canadian workplace, they 'occupy a no-man's-land that becomes a common ground' (Aston 1993: 238). In other words, they were able to summon their shared 'fellow outlaws' identity to perform damage control.

I should note that after his problematic encounter with Faisal, Elias approached the other members of the class, the researcher included, to seek their views on what happened. He wondered if Faisal's anger might have been caused by what he said about the 'white underwear', which he claimed was meant to be a joke. It will be noticed, however, that nowhere in the extract did Faisal make any mention of the 'white underwear'. As an analyst it would be imposing my own interpretation if I attributed Faisal's reaction to Elias's 'white underwear' advice. But since Elias made the attribution, I deconstructed the above extracts drawing from his meaning making perspective. Indeed, as shown below Elias apologised to Faisal the following morning for what he believed to be a misunderstood 'white underwear' joke. He asked Tom if he could say a few words to the group. Below, he stands at the front of the class and performs 'damage control' (Holmes and Marra 2004).

WS310063.01.10.09

I did a mistake

3 Eli xxx actually what I want to say I realised
4 I could erm erm I did a MISTAKE yesterday
5 so just I want to make CLEAR erm it was maybe xxx I -
6 thought I would like to joke sometime but - erm
7 I'm so sensitive towards the feelings
8 of all the people I know, so //

9 Tom // what did you DO? (surprised voice)

10 Eli so so just I want to mention that the erm ADVICE yesterday

11 erm maybe my DEAR (.) colleague here erm (.) Faisal

12 maybe he misunderstood me (.) it was

13 yesterday when I - erm maybe it wasn't so (.) good for me

14 when I made erm the recommendation, you remember,

15 when you start a new job xxx here I thought that erm

16 my FRIEND erm Faisal took it erm as personal

17 erm really I remember something

18 when I make some comments

19 maybe it was, but it wasn't meant (2.0) it wasn't really

20 it WASN'T meant and you know that

21 for me I'm so SENSITIVE (.)

22 I would like the people, to treat the people that exactly

23 that erm th-they treat me, I like sometime joking

24 but I'm so sensitive I don't like to hurt other

25 any feelings of anyBODY so if you (.) misunderstand

26 Fai [no, no] (in an embarrassed voice)

27 Eli [me] I don't -

Elias immediately admits his mistake (line 4) and clarifies that it was a joke (line 6). A close inspection of his apology gives us a clue to the value he assigns to the preservation of his relationship with Faisal and the maintenance of common ground. He invokes in-group membership (line 11, 'my DEAR colleague Faisal') and line 16 (my FRIEND Faisal), again as a conflict management device. It is curious that Faisal says 'no, no' (line 26) when Elias says, 'I like sometime joking but I'm so sensitive I don't

like to hurt any feelings of anybody so if you misunderstand...' (lines 24, 25). My interpretation of Faisal's utterance is that it is his delayed preferred response of an adjacency pair called apology-minimization¹⁴ in Conversation Analysis (see Sacks et al. 1974).

- 28 Eli I DIDN'T mean I mean any, ANYthing to harm you
- 29 Fai [no, no no] (looks embarrassed)
- 30 Eli [and if] I did it I'm SORRY,
- 31 Fai no, no, [no]
- 32 Vely [it's good it's good, no no] (addressing Faisal, taps his arm)
- 33 Eli yeah because also I have erm I'm so open erm and sensitive
- 34 and real, I HEARD some comments from Jinky
- 35 that it shows that I xxx it
- 36 and Jinky maybe [he- she]
- 37 Jink [what's that?]

Above, Elias admits that he did not mean to harm Faisal in line 28 and apologises (line 30). Faisal, again says 'no, no, no' (line 31) which Velyvet seems to interpret as an attempt to stop Elias from continuing with his apology. When Velyvet says 'it's good it's good, no, no' (line 32), he was addressing Faisal even slightly tapping him on the arm to indicate that he does not want him to stop Elias from carrying on with the apology. It will be recalled that when Elias was making the joke about the white underwear, Velyvet was the only one who seemed to notice that Faisal was starting to feel uncomfortable about being the centre of the joke.

Towards the second half of Elias's apology, there appears to be a shift in the intended audience. While the first half was specifically directed at Faisal; the last half

¹⁴ In an apology sequence, it will be marked if one replies 'yes' to a first part sequence of 'I'm sorry.' The preferred, unmarked reply would be 'No problem' or 'Don't worry about it.'

was addressed to the whole class. It is in the second half that we see the extent of the damage control work that Elias tries to do. He has apologised to the offended party above so we might argue that his interactional goal was accomplished. Apparently, however, there is more repair work to be done as he continues below. I see three distinct parts: pre-advice, solidify common ground by the use of an in-group identity marker, and advice-giving.

Part 1: Pre-advice

- 38 Eli mean - meant that or not
39 but in common, IN COMMON, let us let us have this advice
40 advise myself and you (.)
41 let us have this advice advise myself and you.
42 Ss (laugh)
43 Eli here as I said this is really my feeling,
44 for me, I'm open and sensitive erm
45 I'm transparent but let us take this advice from me,

Above, Elias prepares the listeners for the advice that he is about to give; he emphasises advice/advise (lines 39, 40, 41, 45) five times. He also uses the phrase 'in common, IN COMMON' (line 39) which is marked indicating that he is a non-native speaker of English. It seems to function as an inclusive expression that he created 'on the fly' to include everybody in the class, which is confirmed by lines 40 and 41 ('advise myself and you (.) let us have this advice advise myself and you'). Thus, 'in common' can be interpreted as a strong appeal for 'in-groupness'.

Then, as shown in the next extract below, Elias tries to solidify common ground, mitigate the face threat of advice-giving, and lighten the group atmosphere by invoking the in-group identity marker 'ToRAAMba'.

Part 2 Solidify common ground: use in-group identity marker

- 46 Eli my feeling we start (.) up a relation,
47 a long relation, so I hope success
48 for everybody but I will NEVER - I don't imagine
49 we'll ever forget, Tom, Jinky, Rachana, Faisal, Velyvet
50 erm ToRAAMba!
51 All (laugh) ToRAAMba! (in a loud voice, in unison)
52 Vely Mabel!
53 Eli Mabel, Mabel (.) we erm like we are LONG relation whenever
54 and we have back home the same
55 that when you share somebody with food and
56 Vely yeah
57 Eli xxx it is really so the time you eat with somebody,
58 that means it is something
59 you can say that, so for THIS
60 and somebody myself and somebody

In repairing the misunderstanding arising from the previous day's encounter with Faisal, Elias appeals for solidarity (lines 46 to 50). He uses the in-group identity marker 'ToRAAMba', which as explained in Chapters 4 and 5, evolved as a powerful in-group marker from day one of the class. Notice the animated reaction of the class (line 51) with laughter while echoing, in unison, 'ToRAAMba!'. Noteworthy here is how the in-group identity marker is being deployed by the students for multifunctional purposes - 'ToRAAMba', which was previously deployed for building common ground, seems to also function as a redressive strategy and a resource for 'instant laughter.'

Elias's advice above might have been intended more for Faisal than the class as a whole. It can be seen as an 'off-record' (Brown and Levinson 1987) strategy in the form of indirect speech. A possible implicature is that had Faisal taken the time to clarify things (whether the underwear advice was meant to be serious or a joke), then miscommunication might have been avoided.

I argue that the miscommunication repair Elias undertook was complex. Misheard or misunderstood words and grammatically incorrect utterances can be repaired by a simple clarification request or repetition of the problematic item. Meaning can be negotiated until mutual understanding is reached. But when misunderstanding leads to loss of face, hurt feelings and threat to common ground, the repair work required cannot be underestimated. As Schegloff (1987: 203) points out, 'mistaking one action for another' can cause trouble in interaction. In other words, utterances meant to be non-serious/joking, for whatever reason, maybe interpreted by the hearer as serious, which may result in a misunderstanding (ibid).

What is of analytic interest was how Faisal and Elias left out any explicit mention of the 'white underwear' and yet they, including the rest of the class, understood what was being talked about. In making his apology, Elias evoked shared reference by simply referring to it as 'that advice yesterday' (line 10). The words 'that' and 'yesterday' forced the listeners to search for a common reference in order to recover the meaning of Elias's utterance, which may be seen to perform a 'solidary' function in Aston's (1988; 1993) terms. The use of 'that advice yesterday' enacts and reinforces common ground because the comprehensibility of the expression depends on the recoverability of in-group established knowledge (Brown and Levinson 1987: 111). In other words, having common ground as shared interactional history enabled the

members to achieve not only ‘economy of expression’ (Enfield 2008: 223) but also provided them with tools for linguistic politeness.

It will be recalled that Faisal made mention of having been responsible for a government ministry in his country, that he was not a baby and that he was in charge of a nationwide survey involving 1,000 questionnaires. His utterances can be considered ‘off-record’ to ‘say something that is either more general [...] or actually different from what one means’ (Brown and Levinson 1987: 211). If this interpretation is correct then we may assume that both Elias and Faisal were attending to each other’s face needs and protecting common ground using similar strategies. They both left out information and used ambiguous/indirect language to show politeness and respect (Goffman 1969: 12; Holtgraves 2002: 37). It can also be argued that because of the absence of shared cultural norms to guide their behaviour, Faisal and Elias had to rely upon previously acquired intuitive strategies to deal with the uncertainty of intercultural encounters (Canagarajah 2006).

So far, I have argued that the misunderstanding was caused by the misattribution of intention, a problematic aspect of talk-in-interactions which has been referred to as joke/serious by Sacks (cited in Schegloff 1987: 206). But did Faisal interpret Elias’s ‘white underwear’ advice as serious instead of as a joke? Or did he see it as a joke, the way Elias intended (in which case there was no misunderstanding)? It is plausible that Faisal understood Elias’s intent but he might have considered the joking misplaced and inappropriate. As mentioned earlier, Faisal was getting ready to go for an important interview and it would be reasonable for him to expect relevant interview tips from his peers, which has been the accepted practice in the group. It will be recalled in the extract where Elias gave the ‘white underwear’ advice, that there were some disaffiliative comments from Tom (‘let the record show that I put my head down and

shook my head,' lines 24, 25). I suggest then, that the conflict resolution work that went into managing the problematic encounter between Faisal and Elias contributed positively to the social relations within the group. It has a bearing on the analysis that at the time of the encounter, Elias had already started to be perceived as student leader. I already mentioned that he had been chosen by the class to be their spokesperson for a lunch that the group hosted for teachers and programme staff. By apologising to Faisal, admitting his mistake and showing humility in front of everybody, he constructed an image of a student leader who cares about maintaining group harmony. My point here is that although misunderstanding may often lead to undesirable consequences, it can also strengthen existing interpersonal relations as long as members are willing to work at redressing the offense, real or imagined. I suggest that the manner in which conflicts are handled can contribute to the development of relational identity (Cupach and Imahori 1993; Lee 2006) and team cohesion (Tekleab et al. 2009).

Although the 'white underwear' episode took place in the third week of the classroom phase, the advice-giving part with which Elias ended his apology sequence can be seen to have evolved into the students' way of showing care and concern for each other. The 'white underwear' was the first instance in the corpus where there was a hybridization of job-related advice with personal advice. The surprised reactions from Tom, Jinky and Rachana are indications that Elias's action and suggestion were unexpected. This might explain why even Elias had to use humour to frame his advice. I have discussed in Chapter 5 (Section 5.5.4) how Tom and the students juxtaposed personal with career related tips as a shared way of showing care and concern for each other.

It has been claimed that miscommunication can catalyse the restructuring of social relations (Coupland et al. 1991). However, it is difficult to say with certainty if

this was the case in the misunderstanding between Elias and Faisal (and the ensuing repair). But what the data strongly suggest is that it has given the participants new insights about each other, which in turn may influence the way they relate to each other. For example, the excerpts show evidence that Rachana and Jinky were amused to discover that Elias was not the silent and serious type they thought he was. This new knowledge might have influenced their future interactions with Elias. Velyvet, although he did not say a lot during the encounter, influenced the way the apology sequence developed. By telling Faisal to let Elias continue with his extended apology, Velyvet gave the group insights on what he considered appropriate and inappropriate. Although Tom did not approve of Elias's joking manner, he did not try to stop him. His participation in subsequent hybridized career/personal advice sessions indicate that classroom rules are subject to negotiation. I would argue that the fact that he was willing to let the students use 'official' (Swann 2007) classroom time to manage interpersonal conflict inevitably fed into the way teacher-student relations developed. Furthermore, I suggest that Elias's advice ('if you misunderstand it's better not keep it until dark [...] just ask for clari-clarification make it clear [...] don't hide it!'), was a clear attempt at the restructuring of social relations and the negotiation of their joint enterprise of 'one team, one family.' The conflict between Elias and Faisal provided the class with an opportunity to negotiate rules of interaction such as what types of jokes are allowable, and how face damage should be repaired.

6.5 MISCOMMUNICATION AS A RESOURCE

Trying to repair a miscommunication sequence can be face threatening for both the hearer and the listener (Tzanne 2000). If speaker B does not understand speaker A's utterance, speaker B has two options: the first is to do nothing or 'let it pass' and the second is to flag the misunderstanding so that speaker A can make the utterance clearer.

The difficulty with the second option is that it threatens both the hearer's face and the speaker's face. As Tzanne (2000: 193) claims, the speaker's face can be threatened 'by the fact that her/his message is altered by another party in communication' and 'by her/his feeling that s/he ought to correct the hearer's interpretation.' The hearer's face is likewise threatened because of his/her failure to understand the speaker (ibid). The repair process requires delicate work to ensure that the common goal of negotiating meaning does not conflict with the goal to prevent face threats.

If miscommunication constitutes such threat to face, it seems logical then that interactants will go to great lengths to prevent being misunderstood. Sometimes, however, conversation participants may deliberately use misunderstanding as part of facework strategy. As Tzanne (2000: 223) points out, intentional misunderstanding can be deployed as a face-enhancing strategy through the use of teasing, for instance. In the example below, I illustrate how intentional misunderstanding is exploited by Tom not only as a way to mitigate face threat but also as an effective resource to manage a sensitive topic.

In this particular extract, the students were asking Tom about a cooking class which was to take place the following week. They were not sure whether they were supposed to do actual cooking or if it was a class about cooking.

WS310042.18.09.09 Cooking class: Not women's work

- 1 Phil how will be the cooking class? we cook xxx?
- 2 Tom pardon me Phillip?
- 3 Phil how will be the cooking class? (slower delivery)
- 4 Tom how will BE? (.) how will, how will BE?
- 5 Phil so we cook or just cooking class?

Phillip asks a question (core utterance) in line 1; Tom reacts by signalling a mishearing (in line 2). Phillip repeats his question, with a slower delivery, enunciating each word clearly (line 3). Tom partially repeats Phillip's question in line 4 (How will BE? (.) How will, how will BE?) which seems to be intended to get Phillip to focus on form. This also tells us that there was no mishearing in line 2 but more of a pedagogical attempt to get Phillip to notice the grammatical construction of his question. In line 5, Phillip clarifies his question without the problematic part of the utterance 'how will be.' It is not clear whether or not he has picked up on Tom's contextualization cue in line 4 hinting that there is something grammatically incorrect about his question. Another possible interpretation is that he has decided to ignore Tom's subtle cue, choosing instead to focus on his communicative goal. In Firth's (2009: 156) study of telephone negotiations between English *lingua franca* speakers, it was observed that interactants 'focus away from the surface form of language production and focus instead on accomplishing transcendent interpersonal meaning.' In other words, Phillip can be seen to be prioritizing communicative goal-as-target instead of correct linguistic-form-as target. Below, Tom aligns with Phillips' communicative goal, and signals his acceptance of the focus away from the linguistic form by giving a direct answer (lines 6, 7, 10):

- 6 Tom YOU will COOK you will cook in cooking class, Phillip,
7 [YOU will COOK (jokey voice)]
8 Ss [(laugh)]
9 Tom YOU will come in at 9 o' clock that morning
10 and roll up your sleeves and YOU will COOK (laughs)
11 that's how it will be [(.) that's how it will be! (jokey voice).]
12 Ss [(laugh)]

Below, Rachana requests more details (lines 13, 15, 17) about the cooking class but Tom delays giving a direct answer. He asks to make sure that the students are really curious about the cooking class (lines 18, 19, 21) in a teasing manner. Phillip, line 23, emphatically states that he is indeed curious (yes, CURIOUS) about the cooking class:

- 13 Rach on the day, is it one or two hours?
- 14 Tom pardon me Rachana?
- 15 Rach xxx the day Friday xxx
- 16 Tom yeah, what about it?
- 17 Rach is this like erm two hours or maybe //
- 18 Tom // are you guys are you really curious
- 19 [about learning about the cooking class?] (in a jokey voice)
- 20 Ss [(laugh)]
- 21 Tom you're really curious? (jokey voice)
- 22 Ss [(laugh)]
- 23 Phil [yes, CURIOUS.]

So far, in spite of repeated requests for information, Tom has continued to stall. He creates a dramatic build-up in lines 24, 25 and 27, which can be interpreted as a claiming common ground strategy. As Brown and Levinson (1987: 106) emphasise, ‘another way for S to communicate to H that he shares some of his wants is to intensify the interest of his own (S’s) contributions to the conversation’. It should be noted here that the claim to common ground is being deployed as resource for face mitigation, as will become evident in the subsequent interaction.

- 24 Tom o::kay, i can tell you, sure (.) sure (.)
- 25 I can tell you right NOW,
- 26 Ss [xxx (multi-party overlaps)]

27 Tom [o::kay]

28 Ss (laugh)

Then, as if creating suspense, he delivers a half-serious utterance (lines 29, 30, 31, 34, 36) punctuated by repetition ('let's get started, let's get started'), pauses, and hesitation markers 'erm' and 'well'.

29 Tom let's get started then (2.0) let's get started (3.0) erm SO (.)

30 COOKING, well (.) cooking is the process of heating,

31 Ss (laugh)

32 Tom [and chemically altering food] so that it is erm

33 Ss [(laugh)]

34 Tom erm [palatable and safe to eat]

35 Ss [(laugh)]

36 Tom that's what cooking is [(laughs)].

37 Ss [(laugh)]

38 Phil okay

39 Fai you are you are giving a [definition of cooking]

40 Tom (laughs) [the definition of cooking!]

41 Ss (laugh)

Tom's utterances elicit laughter from the students (lines 33, 35, 37) indicating that they are aligning with Tom's use of humour. This interpretation is confirmed by Faisal's line 39, 'you are you are giving a definition of cooking.' By not answering the question, Tom affects a deliberate misunderstanding as a delay strategy. As Tzanne (2000: 224) notes, ambiguity can be exploited by speakers for its many interpretative possibilities to cause strategic misunderstanding.

Finally, Tom explains what the cooking class is about. He signals the change in frame from teasing to serious with a preparatory, ‘alright’ said in a more serious tone of voice (contextualization cue, in Gumperz’s terms):

- 42 Tom alright, cooking erm CONTRARY to popular belief in some countries
43 such as Iraq or Somalia or certain parts of Pakistan or China
44 is NOT WOMEN'S work,
45 CONtrary to popular belief,
46 it is NOT women's work,

He intersperses the above gender-related utterance with face mitigating humour shown below. In an earlier discussion with Tom before the cooking class episode, he had expressed some concerns to me regarding the cooking activity. He had male immigrant students in previous classes who were very averse to the idea of taking part in a ‘women’s activity’ which caused some conflict in the class. In lines 47 to 50, Tom tries to soften the possible face threat to the male members of the class with humour. It seems that he delayed bringing up the gender perspective on cooking so he would have the opportunity to do some mitigation, a way of softening his message without coming across as accusatory.

- 47 COOKING is for anybody that WANTS to [stay alive!] (2.0)
48 Ss [(laugh)]
49 Tom so if you are interested in staying ALIVE,
50 you need to be interested in cooking (.)

After successfully eliciting laughter from the students, he goes on to address the cultural and gender issue as they relate to cooking. His speech is characterised by false starts (lines 51, 52, 56), hesitation markers ‘erms’ (lines 54 to 57) and the clearing of his throat in line 56.

51 so there (.) there - there's a cultural perspective,
 52 now we have we have the - a definition
 53 now we have a CULTURAL perspective,
 54 IN Canada anyhow, it's erm expected that erm that
 55 erm ANYBODY should cook and
 56 there's no – there's really very little gender (clears his throat)
 57 erm gender designation
 58 of of of cooking (.) so (.) yeah (.) so what is cooking class to US?
 59 cooking class to ME is a very good opportunity
 60 to get to know everybody and it's a very good
 61 opportunity for you to get to know each other better,

What interactional benefit does Tom get out of intentionally misunderstanding a question and then delaying giving an answer which could potentially trigger further miscommunication? I would argue that the longer he sustained the talk before touching on a controversial topic like gender, the more time he had to gauge the students' reactions. He then designed his utterances based on the feedback (linguistic, paralinguistic or non verbal) that he got from the students. This can be likened to the notion of 'phenomenon of delay in the production of delicate items' in AIDS counselling (Silverman and Peräkylä 1990: 293). It has been observed that counsellors and patients use 'perturbations' (e.g. pauses, extended in-breaths, hesitation, repairs) to delay using 'delicate' words relating to sexual intercourse, sexual preference and contraceptives (ibid). I also interpret the delay as a form of 'proactive' damage control in the sense that he was carefully preventing potential damage (e.g. resistance from the male students, and role conflicts in the cooking class) before it even gets manifest. Having had a serendipitous chat with Tom about his apprehension of getting the male

members of the class to participate in the cooking activity shaped the way I have interpreted his utterances.

6.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The table below highlights the key points that I want to make in this chapter.

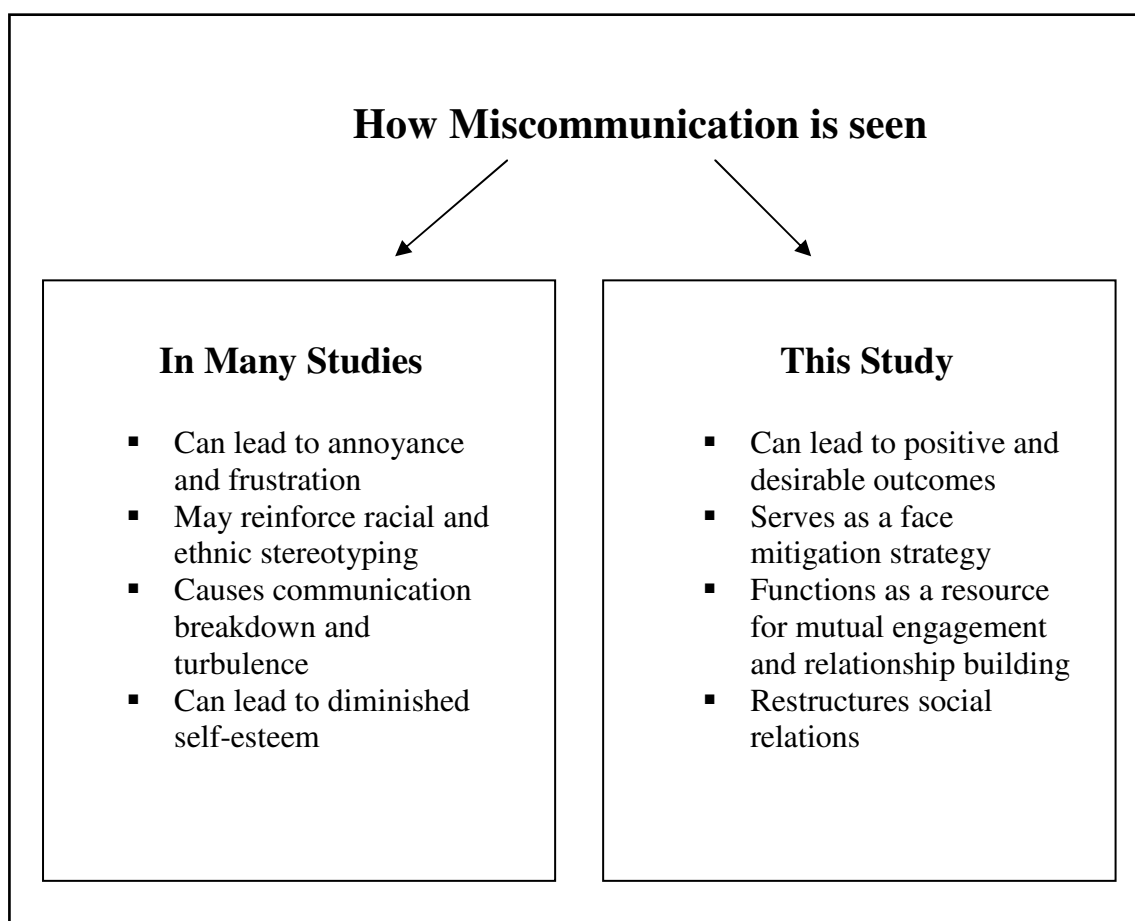


Figure 13 Miscommunication

I have illustrated how the teachers of the EPPI used proactive work in order to prevent misunderstanding. Using the three-part IRF/IRE exchange, they checked to make sure that students knew the meaning of lexical items and idiomatic expressions before they continued with their lesson. This indicates that the pedagogical context exerted an influence in shaping the encounter. Indeed, it can be argued that in most teacher-led classroom settings, the transfer of information necessitates proactive work to

prevent miscommunication. It is important to bear this in mind because the ‘let it pass’ principle observed by Firth (1996) in telephone business negotiations seemed to have been picked up in the ELF/LFE literature as a taken-for-granted characteristic of most *lingua franca* interactions (see Seidlhofer 2004; Canagarajah 2006). The findings in this study showing negotiation of meaning as a strategy preferred over ‘let it pass’ corroborate the results obtained by Cogo and Dewey (2006), Mauranen (2006) and Pitzl (2005).

The ‘roygbiv’ extracts show that proactive work does not always prevent misunderstanding but in fact might lead to more misunderstanding which requires repeated attempts at repair. The ‘roygbiv’ data brought to our attention how differences in common ground-as-knowledge (e.g. pot of gold, vibgyor vs. roygbiv) can cause a slight jarring in the process of repair.

The failed jokes in the computer class lend support to Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz’s (2007: 24) observation that differences of discourse conventions make it difficult for interactants to synchronize their interpretation of what is going on. As I have shown, the students’ uptake of the question ‘why are frogs so happy’ indicated that they interpreted it as a request for information when in fact it was intended to be a funny riddle. Indeed, the effortful and repeated repair attempts demonstrated the shakiness and unpredictability of the interaction. Nonetheless, Kate and the students chose not to ‘let it pass’; instead they sustained the interaction even after the misunderstanding has been clarified. They seemed to have selectively focussed on the ‘idea’ of a joke and the spirit with which it was intended - just because a joking attempt has failed does not mean that the listeners did not enjoy it (Bell 2007). Indeed, joking (and I would argue, including ‘failed’ ones) helps to create team, fosters intimacy and familiarity, ‘puts the hearer at ease’ (Brown and Levinson 1987: 124) and lends a joyful quality to the institutional

nature of classroom interaction. Not being able to understand the play on words does not mean the students did not appreciate it. I have shown how the participants tried to make misunderstanding more acceptable; instead of letting a minor glitch turn into a breakdown, they used it as a starting point to develop related themes. They engaged in a robust discussion about accents, and communication difficulties between people who speak the same language. As Aston (1993) suggests, it can be viewed as a 'joint celebration' because the 'lack of shared sociocultural competence may allow the relatively everyday to be treated as extraordinary' (Aston 1993: 240). In other words, miscommunication has led to positive and 'fruitful' results (Linell 1995) making it possible for repair attempts to be hearable as expression of goodwill and concern (Coupland et al. 1991: 13).

The jury is still out whether miscommunication in the technical sense took place between Faisal and Elias in the 'white underwear' episode. Elias interpreted it that Faisal misinterpreted his intention as stated in his apology. But it is also plausible that Faisal had taken it as a joke, albeit an inappropriate one, which does not qualify it as a misunderstanding based on my definition. What the encounter made very evident though is how the interpersonal relations between the two actors were played out. Their 'off-record' strategy through the indirect use of language suggests intent to minimize face threat. I have shown how Elias tried to mitigate advice-giving while at the same time solidifying common ground by using the in-group marker 'ToRAAMba.' One needs to look at what follows the misunderstanding to see if it has in some ways 'restructured' social organisation. As Ochs (1991: 60) points out, 'misunderstandings are not the loci where social life breaks down. Rather, to the contrary, misunderstandings structure social life. Each misunderstanding is an opportune space for instantiating local epistemology and for structuring social identities of interactants'.

Along the same lines, Coupland et al. (1991: 17) suggest that ‘to the extent that repairs have been achieved, participants have reached a new definition of a situation, a relationship or a group and participants have been resocialized’.

Interwoven in all the extracts is the cooperative quality of repairs and negotiation sequences which is consistent with the findings of other scholars (Meierkord 1998; Seidlhofer 2004; Mauranen 2006; Firth 2009; Georgieva 2009) attesting to the collaborative aspect of *lingua franca* interactions. Similar to Mauranen’s (2006) findings, I observed that the EPPI participants were continually monitoring their own and their co-interactants’ speech so that they could make modifications and adjustments in their discourse to accommodate the construction of shared meanings in real time; in Firth’s words (1996: 256), a ‘compelling evidence of people’s often extraordinary ability to make sense in situ’. Evidently the extracts analysed here show miscommunication instances that were attended to and repaired by the students and teachers. This does not imply that there were no instances of miscommunication that the interactants were unaware of or decided to ‘let pass’. My interest was in miscommunication episodes that were recognised by either one of the speakers instead of being imposed by the observer. The nature of the interaction made it very difficult to make note of precise instances of ‘let it pass’ as a strategy adopted by the students. Keeping quiet and saying ‘yes’ when the teacher asks if they have understood everything does not mean that they actually have understood everything. They may be using ‘letting it pass’ when listening to lectures but it is impossible to tell.

On the other hand, I have shown that teachers tended to expect a display of understanding from the students. These were instances of ‘don’t let it pass’ which as I have discussed lies in the pedagogical context of the interaction. Firth’s (1996) study involved telephone calls between businessmen. They have very specific business goals

that need to be accomplished in a timely manner so they may opt to 'let it pass' - instead of setting aside the business goal at hand to repair linguistic errors. Additionally, telephone talk may also make 'letting it pass' a viable alternative as long as the purpose of the call has been accomplished. Since my research context was in a face-to-face, learning and teaching environment, there were more opportunities for asking questions and clarifying information. Although as I have shown, students tried to 'let it pass' but the teachers insisted on making sure that shared understanding has been achieved before continuing with the discussion. It has been pointed out that 'let it pass' may indicate the speakers' lack of mutual orientation and social alignment with each other (House 1999: 82). In my data, 'let it pass' seemed to be an attempt by the students to save their own face but the teaching/learning context made it a less accepted strategy by the teachers. Indeed, Mauranen (2006: 147) claims that 'let it pass' does not seem to be a viable strategy in academic settings.

This chapter has shown that miscommunication can be deployed as a resource. Tom's intentional use of misunderstanding in the 'Cooking class: not women's work' excerpts functioned as face mitigation of a potentially face threatening and controversial discussion. His strategic delay in bringing up the issue of gender and cooking, interspersed with face enhancing humour, constructed 'caution' in the handling of a delicate topic (Silverman and Peräkylä 1990; Silverman 2001). I am not saying here that gender and cooking is a delicate topic; it was Tom who constructed it as such, signalled by delay and hesitation markers. This interpretation is also supported by a previous discussion with him about his negative experience with previous male participants and their refusal to get involved in the cooking class.

Whether there is more miscommunication in intercultural communication compared to intracultural encounters is difficult to say. There might be more repairs in

intercultural interactions in the form of clarification requests, repetitions, elaborations and explicitness compared to native speaker interactions (Varonis and Gass 1985: 326). However, I argue that these repair mechanisms or ‘signals of uncertainty’ (Faerch and Kasper 1983: 198) activate collaborative work between interlocutors so that a space for the renegotiation of meaning is created. By admitting misunderstanding and engaging in repair, students make salient their language learner identity with the effect of triggering the ‘benevolence principle’ (Aston 1993: 39). In other words, attempts at repair are not seen as disruption to the ongoing activity but as signals of cooperation. Ambiguity, uncertainty and differences of communication conventions become resources for active and sustained mutual engagement instead of barriers to mutual understanding. Although the focus of this chapter has been on miscommunication, the extracts show members constantly engaged in team building talk by way of humour (joke telling, riddles, teasing), collaboration, face mitigation and unofficial talk. I suggest that the shared goal of building team/family was always in the backdrop of the interactions.

A few methodological points also deserve mention here. Using a participant observer approach in collecting the data enabled me to see connections between utterances. In the ‘frog’ miscommunication in Kate’s class, for example, my interpretations would have been severely limited had I stopped the analysis at the part where the funny riddle/joke was misunderstood (absence of laughter, lack of uptake). I would not have been able to see how the participants turned miscommunication into an opportunity for celebration and meaning making.

In this chapter, it was also central to the interpretation that I had been present in the discussions *before* the misunderstanding between Faisal and Elias. It will be recalled that Faisal used ‘1,000 questionnaires’ repeatedly when he confronted Elias. Another observer who did not know that the 1,000 questionnaires referred to the project that

Faisal spearheaded (and that it was common knowledge amongst the students) would not have been able to build this knowledge into the analysis. That I was also present in class the day that Elias made the public apology to Faisal in front of the class, enabled me to refine my thinking about the role that misunderstanding and conflict might have played in the life of this group. Lastly, the serendipitous chat I had with Tom about his apprehension over the cooking class enabled me to use this knowledge in my interpretation. It is tempting to claim that my study succeeded methodologically because of the participant observation method used but on the other hand, there is the realization that it was impossible to observe everything. I suggest, however, that the participant observation method used in the study provided me with valuable insights into how my participants tried to make sense of their social reality.

PART III: SUMMING UP

CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUSION

*We're all going separate ways but I hope that we'll continue with our communication
and our friendship and the feeling that we have been a family together.
And I hope that would be with us forever.*

Jinky, research participant

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the three analysis chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) carry their own conclusions, my principal aim in this chapter is to pull together the key insights drawn from the data and offer some reflections on methods, contributions, and implications of the study. Section 7.2 explicitly makes the link between common ground and intercultural encounters. Section 7.3 summarises the key insights from the study. Section 7.4 outlines how this study has contributed to our knowledge of intercultural communication. Section 7.5 discusses the successes and limitations of the methodology used. Section 7.6 explores the implications of the study with suggestions for further research. Section 7.7 is my 'other version' of the Conclusion.

7.2 COMMON GROUND IN INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

In this thesis I have explored 'what works and what doesn't' and 'what goes right and what goes wrong' in intercultural encounters. I have combined disparate viewpoints from interethnic and English as a *lingua franca* studies to present a comprehensive picture of intercultural communication. I have discussed the relevance of common ground in intercultural communication and examined how common ground could be identified, established, manifested, repaired and maintained in the context of the study. Establishing common ground for the EPPI participants involved creating team and maintaining in-group membership; having a relational identity; using language to show

solidarity and support; mitigating face threats; and performing damage control when necessary.

The EPPI common ground has been shown to be multidimensional, malleable, and multifunctional providing the participants with several communicative affordances. For example, common ground enabled Tom and Elias to carry a ‘long conversation’ that transcended space and time. It enabled Velyvet to simultaneously mitigate negative criticism and strengthen in-group membership through the use of elliptical language. Common ground gave ‘what’ and ‘you understand’ their status as shorthand for group teasing and face management. Common ground gave ‘ToRAAMba’ its power to create team and perform damage control. As the extracts showed, ‘ToRAAMba’ was endowed by the students with multiple meanings such as ‘your apology is accepted,’ or ‘let’s have fun’ or ‘we’re family’ depending on the interactional context. Indeed, the EPPI common ground provided the participants with the tools to say a little and yet mean a lot, to attend simultaneously to transactional and interactional meaning with the least amount of effort such that they were able to ‘cut costs of speech production by leaving much to be inferred by the listener’ (Enfield 2008: 225). From a CofP perspective, the growing common ground eliminated the need for elaborate introductions and gave members shortcuts to communication. The common ground built up out of the participants’ shared history and practices functioned as a common frame of reference or ‘assumptive framework’ that helped to regulate their relationships with each other (Janney and Arndt 2005: 38).

The importance of common ground in intercultural communication finds support in both the *lingua franca* and interethnic literature. The aspect of common ground that pertains to in-group membership is consistent with Seidlhofer’s (2009: 196) notion of the ‘cooperative imperative’. As discussed in Section 2.4, the cooperative imperative,

which seems to underlie *lingua franca* interactions is motivated by the speakers' mutual responsibility for meaning making (Mauranen 2006; Bowe and Martin 2007; Georgieva 2009) and the 'we're in the same boat' principle (House 2003: 569). The team/family aspect of common ground resonates with Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz's (2007: 24) idea that the most ideal condition to learn communication conventions is in a situation 'where speakers can give each other the benefit of the doubt and feel that they can make mistakes without fear of being misjudged.' I would argue that the students and teachers of the EPPI have created the conditions where they could make mistakes knowing that damages would be repaired and threats to face mitigated.

Although language has been privileged as the centre of analysis in this thesis, it should be emphasised that the EPPI group's identity as a team was not only discursively produced but was also solidified by group practices and institutional affordances. As mentioned in Section 2.5.1 in my discussion of CofP, the students engaged in shared practices that promoted team building such as organising a coffee club, hosting potluck lunches, and collaboratively producing a short film that documented their time together. The college which ran the programme also fostered social cohesion through a curriculum that encouraged camaraderie amongst teachers and students by way of group activities (e.g. cooking classes, field trips, lunches).

7.2.1 The Other Side of the EPPI Common Ground

If the notion of common ground as presented in this thesis seems highly positive, I attribute it to what I call my 'participant-observer's analytic license.' As Jinky's epigraph at the top of this chapter and the data extracts in Chapters 4 and 5 (in particular, Sections 4.3 and 5.6) show, the students and teachers of the EPPI have imbued their common ground with positive qualities. Their use of words and

expressions such as ‘team,’ ‘family,’ ‘being in the same boat’ and ‘being part of our big beautiful Canada’ all suggest positive associations. And since part of my ethnographic stance was to see things from the participants’ standpoint, it seemed to me an ethical responsibility to describe and explore my participants’ meanings and meaning making process. However, I cannot abandon my analytic perspective because both the analyst and participant perspectives are necessary to produce insights. In order to adopt a more distant and critical lens, I adopt a CofP heuristic as I reflect on what the participants might *not* have attended to due to their positive feelings about their common ground.

It can be argued that just as CofPs have their negative aspects, so does common ground. Indeed, as Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002: 139) point out, CofPs cannot be expected to ‘solve all problems without creating any’. They contend, for example, that a sense of solidarity amongst members may prevent them from critiquing each other’s work. To illustrate, I analysed in Section 5.5.4 how the students developed the shared practice of giving advice of a personal nature, alongside or instead of employment-related suggestions. With the teacher’s assent, the students hybridized the official space by juxtaposing personal with employment-related advice. It will be recalled that in Section 5.5.4, as Elias was preparing for an important interview, the students focused their feedback on his eye problem. In a subsequent interaction, they gave him pseudo-medical recommendations such as putting coconut oil in his eyes, applying a concoction made out of an unnamed Bangladeshi plant, eating lots of carrots and taking Vitamin A. I did not find out if Elias heeded any of the students’ suggestions but the health complications associated with following some of the recommendations were obvious. A source of concern though might be that Elias did not benefit from getting feedback on his interview techniques which was what he needed at that time. What might be the students’ motivation for the ‘transgression’? One possible

interpretation is that it might have to do with face protection and avoidance of conflict. Recall that Elias had the role of being official spokesperson and leader. So, it might be that critiquing his interview skills was too face threatening for all parties, that it was a more comfortable choice to change the topic or find a distraction. From a CofP perspective, the tight bonds and intimacy amongst the EPPI participants might have lead to a certain level of 'toxic coziness' (Wenger et al. 2002: 144). This toxic coziness might have prevented the members from fully benefitting from the employment support that the programme had to offer.

Another point worth reflecting on is how the students might transfer the social and pragmatic knowledge they learnt from the classroom to the shop floor or office. The immigrants were all relative newcomers to the country and they were in the process of learning and adjusting to the Canadian work environment when they attended the programme. It is likely that certain practices they engaged in while attending the EPPI will not easily transfer to the workplace. For example, the students' practice of sharing information of a highly personal nature may not be well-received by work colleagues; their use of advice as a way to show caring and involvement may be perceived as condescending or inappropriate. In some workplace CofPs, teasing might be used as an insult or a form of aggression instead of the way it has been deployed by Tom as a form of liking and affection (see Section 4.4.2). The students' insistence on keeping tabs on each others' whereabouts and private appointments (see Section 5.5.3) might not be perceived as concern but be viewed as inappropriate nosiness or prying in some contexts. Their shared practice of choosing to negotiate meaning instead of 'letting it pass' may not be easily tolerated by co-workers or customers who want things done very quickly. The EPPI mandate is to prepare the immigrants to enter the Canadian workplace. There is therefore a need for future research to investigate how well the

‘common ground’ practices acquired and encouraged in class prepared the students to navigate social situations that involve co-workers and supervisors, who unlike Kate, Greg and Tom, might not be as generous with giving approval or compliments. I suggest that there is a need to explore how the EPPI students function in an environment where there are already established practices and norms that demand conformity.

7.3 KEY INSIGHTS

In Chapter 3, I stated that the overarching interest that guided the study was: ‘how do the participants who come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds negotiate communication and establish relations, using English as a common language, in an employment preparation programme for Canadian immigrants?’ My sub-questions were:

1. How do the students and teachers of EPPI build and maintain common ground?
2. What discursive strategies and communicative resources do they use to facilitate communication?
3. How do they handle miscommunication/misunderstanding?

I explored the answers to sub-questions 1 and 2 in Chapters 4 and 5 and in the chapter conclusions, I argued that to build and maintain common ground, the students used self-disclosure, humour (e.g. teasing, joking), small talk in unofficial space, solidary and supportive language (agreeing, expressing empathy), in-group identity markers, elliptical language and damage control/repair strategies (e.g. apologising); the teachers used humour, approval/compliment-giving and small talk. The two teachers, Tom and Greg, exerted extra effort to establish warrants for in-group membership by foregrounding ethnic identity of personal relations. The participants deployed a number of resources to build and maintain common ground, which I return to below.

Chapter 6 explored how the participants handled miscommunication (sub-question 3) through the use of proactive work (mainly a teacher strategy), collaboration, mitigating face threats, and not ‘letting it pass’ but instead, explicitly signalling misunderstanding by asking for clarifications and showing persistence in negotiating meaning. Chapter 6 also presented serendipitous insights into the often overlooked aspects of miscommunication. I argued that miscommunication can have ‘positive’ social and interpersonal functions and can be used strategically to perform proactive damage control. Below, I highlight more general key insights from the study. As underscored in the Methodology chapter, and as reflected in the points I make below, these insights arose from an iterative engagement with the data collected through participant observation (in the form of audio recordings, transcriptions and observation notes) and theorizing from other scholars in related disciplines:

7.3.1. Strategic Use of Communicative Resources

This thesis has shown that the participants deployed a variety of resources to achieve their interactional goals which demonstrate their creativity and resourcefulness. The students used shared interactional history and personal knowledge of each other; in-group identity markers and elliptical language; and ‘national’ culture to achieve team/family building goals. The teachers, Tom and Greg, invoked their personal relationships with Filipinos to claim in-group membership.

The findings lend support to Canagarajah’s (2007: 933) argument that ‘competence is not applying mental rules to situations, but aligning one’s resources with situational demands and shaping the environment to match the language resources one brings.’ For instance, the students’ use of elliptical language and off-record politeness to mitigate face threat indicates pragmatic competence in the use of English. They demonstrated the ability to monitor their own talk, remain agile and ready for the

‘impromptu fabrication of forms and conventions to establish alignment in each situation of communication’ (Canagarajah 2007: 932). Limited linguistic proficiency in English did not mean limited communicative resources. Indeed, the students did not even have to use words all the time to express what they meant – they used elliptical language to invoke shared biography and to establish intersubjectivity. Rampton (1997: 300) rightly points out, ‘people either enjoy or overcome differences in language or cultural style’ and ‘accentuate or play down differences according to their immediate situational needs and purposes’. As already mentioned, the EPPI students demonstrated that national culture membership could be strategically re-invoked or played down so that cultural differences became blurred and similarities were given sharper focus.

7.3.2 Preventing Misunderstanding in the Classroom

Consistent with English as a *lingua franca* research, findings indicate that interactions amongst the participants were generally collaborative, supportive and oriented towards solidarity building. However, these results should not obscure the fact that interactions were not always harmonious as we have seen in the two instances of conflict talk in the first month of the classroom phase; nor were they always smooth. Although most English as a *lingua franca* studies claim that miscommunication events are infrequent in *lingua franca* interactions, I exercise caution in making the same claim for my particular context. I was more interested in how miscommunication was handled by the participants, not by the number or frequency of miscommunication episodes observed.

Based on the analysis of data extracts in Chapter 6, Section 6.3, the classroom context of the interaction helped avoid misunderstanding. The teachers’ use of IRF/E discourse helped to expose and prevent potential understanding problems. Given a different context, for example in informal chats or business meetings, there may have

been more instances of ‘let it pass’ where speakers continue the interaction without negotiating form or semantic meaning as long as sufficient understanding is maintained. IRF/E was supplemented by the teachers’ use of ‘metalingual and metacommunicative’ discourse (Kasper 1997: 352) to scaffold the students’ learning experience after a misunderstanding (e.g. Tom explained what teasing meant; Kate said that a joke was a play on words). What was very evident in the extracts was the willingness and openness of the teachers and the students to persevere in spite of repeated failed attempts at repair. As I have shown, the differences in joking schemas and lexical gaps in Kate’s computer class turned a supposed one-liner punch line into several turns of requests for clarifications and explanations.

7.3.3 ‘Lawlessness’ and ‘Suspension of Expectations’

The data lends support to a sense of ‘lawlessness’ (Firth 2009) and ‘suspension of expectations regarding norms’ (Seidlhofer 2004; Canagarajah 2007) observed in English as a *lingua franca* interactions. The lawless quality of the interactions was manifested in a way that the students ‘do not attend, in any explicit way, to their own, or the other’s, ‘‘non-standard’’ usage’ (Firth 2009: 159). Lawlessness allowed the students to impose new and negotiated meanings to words like ‘Tom’s skin’; it enabled them to use name-combining (hello, my name is...) as a ‘symbolic act’ to signal shared identity (Cupach and Imahori 1993: 127). The suspension of expectations of norms was evident in the apology sequences between Phillip and Elias, and later between Elias and Faisal. Both rather lengthy apologies were made in the presence of the whole class. In Phillip’s case, he started his apology by talking about a previous fight with his wife (which can be seen as a violation of the maxim of quantity); in Elias’s case, he ended his apology with advice to the whole class (which can be viewed as a violation of the maxim of manner). Greg’s rather affectionate public and written apology on the whiteboard where

he wrote 'Love to all of you' may be considered unusual in the Canadian adult education classroom context. But for the EPPI students and teachers, apologising can be said to have emerged as both 'creating team' and 'damage control' devices (Holmes and Marra 2004). It is plausible that the more the offender threatens their own face in the act of apologising, the more sincere the apology is perceived to be. Simply put, when interactions are characterized by lawlessness and suspension of expectations, the ambiguity created may act as a catalyst for intensified mutual engagement. While the potential for face damage may be heightened, this is balanced by the group's sense of being 'one team, one family.'

7.3.4 CofP and Common Ground

Using CofP as a heuristic enabled me to look beyond cultural and linguistic differences as 'pre-determined' barriers in the formation of common ground and directed my focus to the cohesive potential of mutual engagement in the pursuit of a common endeavor (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). It helped shift the analytic gaze from viewing speakers as bearers of pre-existing ethnic characteristics to interactants in social practice who conjointly shape the interaction and are shaped by it. The CofP lens made it possible for the analyst to examine how interpersonal conflicts, rule violations and uncertainty could be used as recyclable resources for revitalizing mutual engagement which can lead to emergent patterns for future interactions.

Situating learning and relationship building in practice presented a way out of what seems to me an 'ethnic prison' which binds the speakers to their linguistic backgrounds. As Gumperz (1982: 209) himself admits, communication conventions can be learned in situations where interactants are compelled 'to disregard breakdowns and stay in contact, or give the learner the benefit of the doubt'. According to Gumperz, one example of such a situation is apprenticeship in the workplace. Although the EPPI

situation is not one of apprenticeship in the traditional sense, the socially cohesive and collaborative conditions created by the participants gave them a safe common ground conducive to disregarding breakdowns, staying in contact, and giving each other the benefit of the doubt.

CofP's notion of joint enterprise has been criticized for being too general (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999: 175) which may limit the CofP's utility for investigating different communities. I would argue however that it is this 'general' quality of the CofP model that can empower the analyst to 'layer in' an analytic framework that can allow for a closer inspection of the data. The use of common ground in this thesis as a participant-derived perspective served as a useful microscopic lens to analyse 'persons and situated encounters' while CofP was deployed to zoom out from a micro to a macroscopic perspective in order that 'situations, networks and communities of practice' (Rampton 2007a: 03) could be used to locate the analysis. As Corder and Meyerhoff (2007: 457) rightly emphasise, CofP can be mined for maximum utility if 'used *in conjunction* with other theoretical constructs, rather than in place of them' (my emphasis). Indeed, CofP, in conjunction with common ground, allowed the analytic eye to explore the data from a variety of angles.

7.3.5 Culture in Intercultural Encounters

This study corroborates Bae's (2002) and Mauranen's (2006) findings; they both found no conclusive evidence in their studies to suggest that cultural differences (in the traditional sense of 'national' culture) contributed to misunderstanding. The findings in this study partially support House's (2002: 260) 'cultural irrelevance hypothesis' which posits that in ELF interactions, 'culture-specific discourse behaviour is interactionally and communicatively irrelevant'. I say only 'partially' because my data showed that the participants use culture as a resource. They distanced themselves from their national

culture to establish EPPI membership and blur differences. And yet as I have shown in Chapter 5, they also foregrounded how in spite of their cultural differences, they were able to form a team/family. Culture appears to have been conceptualized by the participants as being associated with national and ethnic differences. Tom and Greg, for example, repeatedly evoked their ‘Filipino identity-by-association’ through their anecdotes (about Tom’s Filipino wife, Greg’s Filipino caregiver), use of *Tagalog* words and a constant display of their knowledge about the Philippines and Filipinos. Although current scholarly thinking tends to be quick to dismiss the notion of culture as being linked to nationality, it was evident in my study that the participants used this as a strategic and invaluable resource.

I discussed in Sections 2.2 and 2.3 that culture intersects, merges and cohabits with other social categories (i.e. economic class, educational attainment, religion, and gender) that constitute a person’s identity. Any one of these categories can become salient in the interaction. Indeed, although the analytic lens has been focussed on culture, a huge range of potential identity categories are in constant interface with each other and with the context during the course of the encounter.

7.4 SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

7.4.1 Knowledge claims: Particularity and Transferability

I stated in Chapter 1 that the aims of the study on which this thesis is based were two-fold: to present a comprehensive picture of intercultural communication by looking at the much neglected area of ‘what works’; and to challenge the widely held notion that intercultural interaction is by nature problematic and susceptible to misunderstanding due to cultural differences. These are ‘grand’ aims and the question worth asking at this point is: How can I make valid claims by drawing insights from a ‘uniquely situated

reality’ (Blommaert and Jie 2010: 17) in a community college in the western part of Canada, and involving a mere handful of immigrants and their teachers? How can this qualitative report help us make sense of intercultural interactions at an international university in Egypt or a factory in New Zealand that employs people from different cultures? In other words, how can we account for transferability while at the same time claiming particularity?

Transferability, often used synonymously with generalizability, is ‘when readers feel as though the story of the research overlaps with their own situation and they intuitively transfer the research to their own action’ (Tracy 2010: 845). The notion is similar to Tannen’s (2005: 50) ‘aha!’ factor, discussed in Chapter 3; ‘aha’ moments are those instances when readers find that the researcher’s interpretation resonates with their own experience or knowledge. As Rampton, Roberts, Leung and Harris (2002) posit, to generalize means, in effect, to say to the reader, ‘this is the situation I studied, and these are the things I found going on there. Look at it in detail. How does it compare with the situations you know? Are there processes here which compare with things that you’ve observed? Are your processes a bit different? What is it in our two situations that could account for these differences’ (ibid: 374). Below, I outline how the findings from my study of a particular social reality contribute to the broad academic pool of knowledge about common ground and intercultural communication.

7.4.2 Contributions

Tracy (2010: 845) provides a list of criteria which I find helpful in reflecting on my original contributions to knowledge. The criteria relevant here are: *theoretical* significance (does the study extend, build or critique existing knowledge), *heuristic* significance (does it inspire further research and curiosity, move other researchers to ask new questions in different settings) and *methodological* significance (are the methods

used innovative or useful to other researchers). The last criterion is *practical* significance (is it useful, does it help solve problems) which I do not discuss in this section but return to in Section 7.6. As discussed above, the transferability and therefore usefulness of a particular study mainly rests with the reader. It is my hope however that the findings will be of use to language learners/teachers, companies who employ people from diverse cultures, immigrants and people who work with immigrants.

7.4.2.1 Theoretical significance

This thesis enables readers to focus in detail on what is involved in communicating across cultures in a specific context and to draw insights from this particularity about intercultural interaction more generally. This thesis builds on and extends knowledge from two approaches in the study of intercultural communication. I looked into interethnic communication studies to explore the claims made about miscommunication arising from cultural differences. Then I examined findings from English as a *lingua franca* research to gain insights into how speakers from different backgrounds manage to communicate successfully. In other words my study is grounded in the well-established scholarship by Gumperz and colleagues and the relatively new but very dynamic field of English as a *lingua franca* research. But unlike the interethnic approach, I did not start from the premise that intercultural communication is of its nature problematic or that differences in communication conventions necessarily lead to misunderstanding. I showed what people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds actually do rather than starting from assumptions about what people in intercultural encounters do. The extracts analysed in Chapter 6 on miscommunication were explored on their own terms rather than starting from an *a priori* characterisation of the participants as possessing differing communication styles, thus avoiding what Sarangi (1994: 414) calls 'analytic stereotyping'. By focusing on

situated interactions, I attempted to demonstrate that the EPPI participants were not ‘prisoners of their communicative inheritances’ (Rampton 1997: 300) but resourceful agents who have the capacity and creativity to reach their communicative goals.

This study extends current knowledge of English as a *lingua franca* research. While ELF and LFE proponents have identified face considerations, supportive attitudes and collaboration as contributing factors to interactional success, there has been a paucity of investigations that illustrate exactly how speakers do these. Although it has been noted by researchers that *lingua franca* competence may, depending on the specific context, entail interaction and negotiation strategies more than mastery of linguistic knowledge (Canagarajah 2007), interaction and negotiation have not been investigated in detail. I would argue that interaction and negotiation require a whole set of interpersonal skills from activating previously learnt pragmatic and attitudinal resources to balancing the achievement of goals with face considerations. If language use for *lingua franca* speakers is to be reframed as situated in actual practice, then relevant questions need to be asked. How does knowledge of interactional devices (in the sense of Aston, for example) facilitate negotiation? What face mitigation strategies can be used to negotiate meaning skillfully? As the present study has shown, the EPPI participants employed a number of communicative strategies to suit different goals. They used elliptical language and in-group identity markers to give mitigated feedback; off-record politeness, and ‘strategic’ miscommunication to negotiate potentially problematic interactions.

In a modest way this research has provided insights into linguistic politeness in intercultural contexts. It contributes to the field of politeness research which has seen an explosion in interest since Brown and Levinson’s publication of their monograph, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* in 1978 and 1987. The trend in

politeness research has tended to be ‘cross-cultural’ in approach (comparing politeness phenomena in different linguistic and cultural groups) which is reflected in a number of politeness studies such as *Linguistic Politeness in Britain and Uruguay* (Marquez-Reiter 2000), *Politeness Phenomena in England and Greece* (Sifianou 1992) and *Politeness in Europe* (Hickey and Stewart 2005) which examines politeness in 22 European countries. Given increased contact between people from different backgrounds using English as the language of communication, I argue that there is a need to undertake research of a more ‘intercultural’ nature which involves looking at how linguistic politeness is manifested in interactions between people from different linguistic and cultural groups. This thesis has shown how politeness norms in specific contexts are negotiated over time by speakers from diverse backgrounds using English as a *lingua franca*. For example, we have seen how the EPPI students used in-group identity markers to soften the face threat of giving negative feedback and how they deployed ‘public, on-record’ apologies to restore social equilibrium. I do not know of any empirical studies that show the development and negotiation over a period of time of member-defined politeness conventions in intercultural contexts.

7.4.2.2 Heuristic and Methodological Significance

This thesis contributes to our knowledge of how a socially cohesive group forms from the ground up. It gives us insights into how language plays a part in enacting and reflecting the degree of intimacy amongst the participants. The methods of data collection which were used to track participant interactions over a period of time, from the first to the last day of the group’s existence, enabled me to trace how the students and teachers drew from previous interactional history as a resource, and as an ‘ad hoc frame of reference’ (Janney and Arndt 2005: 38). Spending time with the participants and examining longer stretches of discourse gave me some access to participants’

interpretative contexts. For instance, because I had insider knowledge of in-group language I was able to take note of the development of a shared linguistic repertoire. Most importantly, I was able to build into the analysis how common ground took shape and how it facilitated and was facilitated by self-disclosure, humour, small talk and approval/compliment-giving. The analysis of the different configurations and multifunctionality of common ground lends itself to a data collection method that follows the formation of social relations from being strangers to being like ‘brothers and sisters.’

Unlike most CofP-inspired studies which look at already established communities of practice, I showed the starting points of mutual engagement, the initial negotiation processes of a joint enterprise and the groundwork that went into the emergence of a shared repertoire.

Unlike many interethnic and *lingua franca* studies where the researcher is a non-participant observer or a detached analyst, I was not only a participant observer, I evolved into an in-group member in the sense that I was privy to participants’ in-group language and I took part in classroom activities. I was able to maintain the necessary analytic tension of being a ‘detached’ observer and an ‘involved’ participant.

7.5 SUCCESSES AND LIMITATIONS

7.5.1 Successes

Field entry and negotiation of access were facilitated by having a friend and former colleague who helped me connect with the right gatekeepers and programme staff. Having a good relationship with Marra and Tom fortified my entry especially when they asked me to share their office with them. I felt like an insider who had a 360° view of the EPPI. I was freely able to socialise with the teachers in the teacher’s lounge

and also able to join the students during lunch hours and coffee breaks without appearing intrusive.

The structure of the programme, having a definite start date and end date, was a definite strength. There was no marked disruption caused by researcher entry and exit. I started on the same day as the EPPI participants and ended my field work on their last day of class. Most importantly, having a beginning and ending point enabled me to build some temporal dimension into the analysis.

The pre-existing commonality (being a Canadian immigrant, non-native speaker of English) I share with the students served as a way to break the ice. My ethnicity and national culture became an invaluable resource that I deployed at opportune moments. I did not feel that I had to work very hard at building warrants for solidarity and support (in Aston's sense) because I could always invoke my Filipino immigrant identity, depending on the purposes of the conversation. Having worked as an employment facilitator for immigrants in the past, I was able to appeal to that part of my identity when dealing with teachers and staff. I was, throughout the research process, always conscious of my relationship with the participants. Although my principal goal was to collect data, it was important to me that the participants did not feel as if I was just there for my own selfish interests. Jinky's words during the farewell lunch were reassuring: 'I know your purpose is to research but you have not let us feel that you have been here for just the research but you have been with us to help us too.'

7.5.2 Limitations

Limitations come with the successes in terms of shared identity repertoires and 'in the same boat-ness'. There were instances when I felt that the commonality of background and experiences with the EPPI participants prevented me from fully

accessing the uniqueness of their experiences. On several occasions, when I asked the students about their feelings of leaving their countries behind and moving to Canada, they would say ‘you know what it’s like; it’s the same for you.’

A major limitation of this study is that I was unable to conduct a feedback session with the EPPI participants. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, I attempted to build member elicitation procedures into my research but the participants’ busy schedule made it untenable. The analysis might have been enriched by their input and comments. However, I do realise that even if they had had the time and opportunity to discuss audio extracts, transcriptions and interpretations, there would be other limitations to deal with (memory lapse, varying interpretations, hearing themselves and other people in recordings might cause embarrassment).

A further shortcoming of the study is that it presents a limited view of the work involved in building/maintaining common ground in the sense that it focused only on interactions in the classroom and lunch hour chats. There is informal evidence in the data suggesting that the two female participants, Rachana and Jinky, might have done a lot of team building work in the background. As already mentioned, the students socialised with each other at weekends and evenings. Some sections of the corpus allude to supportive phone calls that both Rachana and Jinky regularly made to the other participants. Gender may be a factor here, though this was not a focus of my study, and, except on one occasion (Tom’s reference to cooking), gender was not made relevant by the participants in their interactions. This may, however, be an issue to follow up in future research.

7.6 IMPLICATIONS

The insights from this thesis can be useful to the field of second language learning and teaching. Traditional pedagogies tend to promote the target language as the model

to aspire to which goes hand in hand with a teaching model that emphasises the avoidance of grammatical errors. But as the students in my research demonstrated, interactional and repair strategies may in some contexts be more important than mastery of linguistic codes and grammar. The findings suggest that language teachers may need to re-evaluate the prevailing negative associations of miscommunication – deficit, failure, breakdowns, and language incompetence – and reframe them as potential opportunities for practising interactional skills and rapport building. Indeed, asking for clarification does not have to signal lack of lexical knowledge, it can signal interest and curiosity in what the other person has to say. Requests for clarification can be seen as interruption or they can be viewed as signals for the negotiation of meaning. This study supports Aston's (1988) recommendation that L2 pedagogy needs to create more space in the teaching of the language of comity in the classrooms. If there is good rapport between interactants, then there is the likelihood that the negative consequences of communication breakdowns and miscommunication might be better tolerated (ibid: 38).

Data evidence suggests that there may be definite advantages for the language teacher to concentrate on developing the adult students' negotiation strategies rather than focusing most of the effort on grammatical correctness (at least in the case of my participants who had already achieved a certain level of fluency). This is perhaps particularly relevant to those who are learning English for specific purposes such as employment. The degree to which specific workplaces or CofPs will tolerate lengthy negotiations of meaning will of course vary. Given the evidence from the data extracts, achieving mutual understanding may require face management skills to temper the potential face threats of repair work. Since it is impossible to predict how *a priori* differences in communication conventions will manifest in the interaction, it might be useful to put an emphasis on language learning as a collaborative and social activity

rather than as an individual achievement (Canagarajah 2007; Firth and Wagner 2007; Chiang 2009). Enhancing the language learners' ability to 'detect and remedy lapses, to learn from pitfalls, to improve on success, to profit from the examples of others, and to get things right' (Chiang 2009: 390) would equip them with the skills necessary to continue the learning process when they leave the classrooms. How can interactional, negotiation, face management and rapport building strategies be learnt or taught in a classroom setting? Based on the data extracts, the EPPI students already had all those skills. As multilingual speakers, they seemed to have been able to activate pragmatic and interpersonal skills that they developed when learning their first language. What may be helpful for language teachers is to provide opportunities in the classroom where those skills might be activated such as role plays and small group discussions.

7.6.1 Further Research

It can be argued that the EPPI classroom is a relatively safe and non-threatening environment for students where team/family building was fostered by the teaching staff and the college. As the data extracts in Chapter 4 illustrated, the teachers consciously attended to building common ground and downplayed their institutional power by using humour and small talk, and by giving approval and compliments. However, while having harmonious relations in the classroom may be conducive to learning, the situation may be more challenging in the workplace. It would be illuminating to conduct follow-up research with some of the students to find out how they managed the transition from a safe common ground to the Canadian workplace, and to identify the communication strategies that they found useful in the workplace. Findings from an on-the-job participant observation study might be used to inform government policy in training immigrants and curriculum development of programmes such as the EPPI. It

can be argued that employment preparation programmes could benefit from specific teaching materials based on the workplace CofP that students are intending to apply to.

The data analysis in this thesis was drawn from only 30 hours of transcribed data. The analysis focused on student to student and teacher to student interactions. I also have audio recorded data of live phone calls that the students made to employers for the purposes of making interview appointments and inquiring about job openings. Preliminary analysis suggests that most employers seemed willing to accommodate to the students. When they heard the accent on the other end of the line, they tended to speak slower. They also asked the students to repeat and spell their names. A closer analysis of these live phone calls to employers would deepen our knowledge of gate-keeping encounters in a Canadian setting. It would enable us to compare the results with findings of similar studies (for example, Gumperz 1982; Roberts et al. 1992; Campbell and Roberts 2007).

7.7 CONCLUSION: ‘THE OTHER VERSION’

As I write this section, Rachana’s words come to mind: ‘tell them our story, it will help them’ (in Chapter 1 epigraph). I just hope that I have done justice to their story; that I have crafted the narrative in such a way that it captures the essence of the temporary world that seven immigrants and their teachers shared for twelve weeks. In the telling, I probably made a lot of grammatical and spelling mistakes. It has been painstaking and I often wondered how much easier it might have been if English was my mother tongue. My identity as a non-native speaker of English rises to the surface when I know that I am communicating with native speakers. I hope that the readers of my work will not let ‘marked’ collocations or odd words distract them from the arguments that I have tried to put forward. On the other hand, I know that I need to demonstrate that I share the same linguistic repertoire; I need to show the readers that I

am able to foreground my 'competent writer/researcher' identity instead of my 'I'm non-native, forgive my English' identity. I wonder if I have learnt the equivalent of ToRAAMba in the academic lingo. Have I used the appropriate in-group identity markers and in-group language? Am I ready to move forward from being an apprentice to being an expert? I find encouragement in Elias's words: 'you have it POLISHED now and you are ready to GO you are ready all the time any place any time'.

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PUBLICATIONS DRAWN FROM THESIS

Victoria, M. (2011) 'Ethical dimensions of shared ethnicity, language and immigration experience', *TESL Canada Journal*, vol. 28, no. 5, pp. 72-79.

Victoria, M. (forthcoming, accepted for publication) 'Turning Miscommunication Events into Opportunities for Developing Interactional Competence'. Special Issue on Advanced Learners. *Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics*

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 Scoping Study Request Letter

Working Title:

An Exploratory study of Social Interaction in a Multicultural Group: How People from Different Linguistic and Cultural Background Successfully Negotiate Communication

Background of the Study

As Canadian immigrant and a speaker of English as a second language, I am interested in carrying out research that seeks to understand how people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds *successfully* communicate and establish social relations (using English as a common language). I am a postgraduate student at the Open University UK and I am undertaking this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a higher degree.

There is an existing wealth of literature on language learning and inter- and cross-cultural communication. However, I find that the emphasis tends to be on miscommunication and misunderstanding - on 'barriers,' 'difficulties,' 'obstacles' and 'sociopragmatic failures.' While granting that these studies are helpful and illuminating, I would argue that it is just as valuable to focus on the much neglected aspect of 'what works.' How do people with varying English language proficiency and different socio-cultural background knowledge successfully negotiate interaction? What linguistic or paralinguistic strategies do they deploy to build understanding? What communicative resources do they use to 'repair' a possible misunderstanding?

Aims of the Pilot Study

The overarching aim of the pilot study that I intend to undertake in March 2009 is to generate hypotheses or tentative answers to the 'working' questions posed above. I will refine these hypotheses and generate specific research questions that will be investigated during the main data collection phase which is planned to take place between September to November 2009. During the pilot stage I hope to

- visit possible research settings
- evaluate the feasibility of undertaking research there
- discuss initial ideas with participants to determine level of interest and practical relevance
- establish research parameters with the research site including intrusiveness, ethical considerations, and arrangements for feedback.

What is involved?

I will be using ethnography, a broadly qualitative methodology which is associated with 'studying groups in their natural settings' and 'obtaining an *insider* perspective so that activities are understood from the standpoint of group members' (Swann et al 2004). Part of the ethnographic tradition is using observation (participant or non-participant) as a way of collecting data.

With permission, I would like to observe on-going group activities which can be language/conversation/TOEFL/licensure classes, orientations and recruitment sessions, employment preparation/requalification programs, etc. If it is not too disruptive, I would also like to have informal chats/unstructured interviews with program staff, facilitators and participants. Depending on the comfort level of the group, and with informed consent, I might make an audio recording of some on-going interaction between people.

Practical Applications

I am keen to explore how this research might be made useful to facilitators and people participating in the sessions. I think that findings may be particularly useful to providers of services to immigrants in developing language and training programs. A key goal in the pilot phase of my research will be to explore with facilitators and participants the potential uses of my research.

Further information

If you have any questions about my proposed research I would be very happy to discuss these with you. I have provided my contact details below:

Mabel Victoria
PhD Student
The Open University
Faculty of Education and Language Studies
Walton Hall, Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA

My phone number from March 1 to March 19, 2009: _____

APPENDIX 2 Research Table

RESEARCH TABLE		
<u>Overarching Question:</u> How do individuals from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds negotiate communication in an employment preparation program for Canadian immigrants?		
Research Questions	Data Sources	Analytical Method/ Framework/Tools
1. What communicative strategies do students use when interacting with their facilitators? With each other? How do they build understanding? How do they repair possible misunderstanding?	Classroom observation (field notes) Audio recording (transcribed)	Discourse Analysis Thematic Analysis
2. What communicative strategies do facilitators use when interacting with students? How do they build understanding? How do they repair possible misunderstanding?	Classroom Observation (field notes) Audio recording (transcribed)	Discourse Analysis (politeness/facework management models/relational language) Thematic Analysis
3. In what ways are the facilitators' and students' use of communicative strategies similar or different? How may any differences be accounted for?	Classroom observation (field notes) Audio recording (transcribed)	Discourse Analysis Thematic Analysis
4. What other factors contribute to successful intercultural communication?	Interview with facilitators and participants, focus group discussion, maybe questionnaires Observation Notes Ethnographic description (room arrangement, program activities, etc) Documents	Thematic Analysis Envivo/ Atlas.ti to analyse interview/focus group data Description of Context Documentary analysis

APPENDIX 3 Information and Consent (2 parts)

A Study of Intercultural Communication in a Group Setting
The Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology
Applied Language and Literacies Research Unit (ALLRU)
The OPEN UNIVERSITY UK
<http://creet.open.ac.uk/index.cfm>

Part 1 Information Sheet

I am asking for your voluntary participation in a research study that is part of the requirement for a doctorate degree in Applied Linguistics. This undertaking has been reviewed and has received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Review Committee of both CWC and The Open University UK.

Before you agree to participate in this study, it is important that you read about and understand the study and the procedures it involves. Below, I outline some information about the study which I will also explain to you personally to give you the opportunity to ask questions.

What is the purpose of the research?

The main aim of the research is to understand how people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds successfully negotiate communication and build social relations (using English as a common language). I want to analyse the factors that contribute to successful intercultural communication.

As an essential part of my data, I need to observe and make an audio recording of spoken interaction between teachers and students in the classroom. I will also interview the teachers and three to five students to clarify what I observed in the class and to ask questions about effective communication.

Who are the intended participants?

I am asking the teachers/facilitators, and all immigrant students of the Employment Program for Immigrants (EPPI) program attending the September to November 2009 in-class phase, to participate in the study.

As an immigrant to Canada and a speaker of English as a second language, I am interested in carrying out research with participants who share a similar experience.

What does it mean to participate?

If you consent to take part in the study, it means that you will be consenting to me viewing and taking notes of your classes as well as tape recording some of the sessions. I will always inform you ahead of time of any tape recording. If you do not want me to audio tape record certain class sessions, just tell me, and I will not tape it. If I have

made a recording of specific lessons and you do not want me to include it as part of the data, I will erase it.

I need to interview the teachers involved with EPPI and three to five volunteer EPPI students. If you volunteer and consent to be interviewed, you will be giving me permission to ask you questions and to tape record your responses. During the interview, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. Also, if you want me to turn off the tape recorder at any point during the interview, I will do so.

What is the time commitment involved?

If you give me consent to observe and tape record the classes, there is no time commitment required of you as a participant in the study. I am interested in naturally occurring data which means that I observe what you normally do in the classroom (with or without the researcher).

If you volunteer to be interviewed, you consent to take part in three 40-minute conversations with the researcher outside of the normal class hours. The first interview will take place in the third week of September, the second interview in mid-October, and the last interview will be in mid-November.

How long and how often will the observation take place?

The data collection part of this research takes place between September and November 2009 to coincide with EPPI's in-class schedule. Ideally, to get rich data for the purposes of the study, I will observe and record at least six full weeks of the 12-week program. However, the program staff and teachers will have the final say on the least disruptive way to proceed with the observation.

What about confidentiality?

To honour your privacy and ensure confidentiality, all audio recordings of observations and interviews will be stored in a password protected laptop only accessible to the researcher. Your identity will be protected by the use of a pseudonym in all transcribed data and observation notes. All research materials will be stored in a securely locked cupboard in the researcher's university office in the UK.

I will also use pseudonyms for CWC and EPPI to preserve the anonymity of the college and the program.

How long will the data be kept by the researcher?

On completion of the PhD (expected to be December 2011) personal information that may be associated with individuals or the institution will be destroyed. Raw data (audio recordings, observation and fieldnotes) will be anonymised or deleted depending on its suitability for further research.

Are there benefits to taking part in this study?

The findings of the study can serve as useful information to you when dealing with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Other people like English language teachers, English language students, providers of services to immigrants, policy makers and employers who employ a multicultural workforce can also benefit from the findings of this study.

After the data have been transcribed and analysed I am happy to give feedback to teachers and students regarding their use of communicative strategies based on actual data.

If the teachers and students are interested, I can offer a workshop that can benefit them directly. I have an MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language and have worked for more than ten years as a career and settlement counsellor. I am also a certified Life Skills coach. Depending on what is most relevant to the teachers and students, jointly or separately, I can offer a workshop on 'Creative Career Planning and Job Search Techniques,' Stress Management, English for Specific Purposes, English for Academic Purposes, Creative CVs for the Global Market, etc.

We can discuss what topic is of most relevance to you and we can also agree on when is the most convenient time for you to participate in a workshop. Alternatively for teachers, I can assist them in the classroom if they prefer. For example, if they need someone to practice job interviews with the students, I can be of assistance as I have many years of experience helping immigrants prepare for job interviews.

Are there risks to taking part in this study?

There is no risk foreseen in taking part in this study. I will try to be unobtrusive and not to disturb the classes. To help you get used to my presence, I will only observe half days during the first two weeks and I will not make any recording.

If you feel that you cannot fully participate in class due to being observed or tape recorded, please let me know and we can discuss what can be done about it.

Will there be any payment or monetary benefits?

You will receive no payment for participation. The research is solely for academic purposes and relies on and appreciates the goodwill of the participants in the research.

What happens if the whole group does not want to consent to participation?

I sincerely hope that the whole class will consent to participate in this research. However, if the whole group decides not to take part, I will discontinue the research.

If some members do not consent to taking part, I will not make observation notes of their interaction in class. I will not transcribe the part of the audio recording in which their voices have been captured.

Withdrawal of Consent

You may withdraw your consent before data are transcribed and analysed which is expected to be June 2010. If you decide to withdraw, I will not transcribe nor use any discussions to which you have contributed.

How will the participants be informed about the results of the study?

It is expected that the final results will be available by December 2011. I will send you a report of the main findings by email or post, whichever you prefer. My contact details are below so you can email or telephone me at anytime to inquire about the progress of the research.

What are your rights as a participant?

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so. And even if you initially choose to participate, and change your mind later on, you are also free to do so and you do not need to provide any explanation.

Contact Details

Principal Researcher: Mabel Victoria
M.Victoria@open.ac.uk

Phone: +44 (0) 1908 858652
Phone: 487 8647 (Sept to Nov 2009)

Supervisors at The Open University:

Joan Swann J.Swann@open.ac.uk
Theresa Lillis T.M.Lillis@open.ac.uk

Phone: +44 (0) 1908 652410
Phone: +44 (0) 1908 652375

Head of Ethics Committee, CWC:

If you have any further concerns or questions about Ethics Approval and your rights as a research participant, please contact:

Name of Contact person

Email of Contact

Phone:



Part 2 Certificate of Consent

By signing this document, you are showing that you have been informed of what it means to participate in this study, you have read Part 1 of the document, you have had all your questions answered, and you fully agree to participate in this study. Please keep Part 1 and a spare copy of signed Part 2 for your records.

I _____ (please print your name), consent to taking part in this study. I have read Part 1 of this document, have been informed of participation procedures and have had my questions answered. I have been informed that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation if I choose to do so.

Signature_____

Email_____

Phone: _____

Date_____

APPENDIX 4.1 Interview Guide for Teachers

First interview	Second Interview	Third Interview
Overarching goal of the programme/your role		
Teaching experience, own linguistic and cultural background	Questions for the researcher	Questions for the researcher
Initial thoughts/impressions about teaching the current group of students	How the classes are going, if goals and expectations are being met.	How the classes went, if goals and expectations have been met.
Describe teaching experience with previous group in terms of communication challenges and how they were addressed	Describe how current group compares with previous group in communicative strategies used in class.	Describe how current group has progressed communicatively since last interview.
Feelings about teaching students from different cultural and linguistic background.	How cultural and linguistic background affect communication with and amongst students in class.	How cultural and linguistic background affected communication with and amongst students in class.
What factors might influence communication in class of NNS	Communicative strategies that you use/ that students use to build understanding, repair misunderstanding in class.	Communicative strategies that you used, that students used to build understanding, repair misunderstanding in class.
How students' communicative proficiency in English assessed.	Progress in terms of students' (English) communicative ability since first day of instruction.	Progress in terms of students' (English) communicative ability since first day of instruction.
Opinion – factors that foster effective communication in class.	Assessment of the communicative environment in class.	Assessment, after 12 weeks, of communicative environment in class.
		Opinion – the readiness of students for work placement
Feelings about being interviewed, observed	Feelings about being interviewed/observed	Feelings about being interviewed/observed
Questions for the researcher	Questions for the researcher	Questions for the researcher
		Contact details for future communication after data collection.

APPENDIX 4.2 Interview Guide for Students

First interview	Second Interview	Third Interview
Life before Canada - job, profession, also reasons for choosing Canada		
Life in Canada since emigrating	Questions for the researcher	Questions for the researcher
Reasons and expectations for joining this program	How life has been in XXX since last interview (question will be more specific depending on issues brought up in first interview). If expectations are being met.	How life has been in XXX since last interview (question will be more specific depending on issues brought up in second interview). If expectations about program met.
Initial thoughts, impressions about the school, the program, facilitators and other students	Thoughts about the school, the program, facilitators and other students, own progress	How was the whole experience of being in the program, interacting with facilitators and other students
English usage: language use at home, at work in native country, in the program, in Canada	Feelings about communicating in English in class, and in general outside of class	Feelings about communicating in English in class, and in general outside of class
How English was learnt: difficulties, comfort level using it in native country, in the program in Canada	Thoughts about English learnt in class	Thoughts about English learnt in class
Personal assessment of English proficiency in reading, writing, listening, speaking	Personal assessment of English communication skills in class and in general outside of class	Personal assessment of English communication skills in class and in general outside of class
Communication Difficulties experienced in class, our outside – what was done	Communication Difficulties experienced in class, our outside – what was done	Communication difficulties experienced in class, our outside – what was done
		Thoughts about going for work placement
Feelings about being interviewed and tape recorded, observed in class	Feelings about being interviewed and tape recorded observed in class	Feelings about being interviewed and tape recorded observed in class
Questions for the researcher	Questions for the researcher	Questions for the researcher
		Contact details for future communication.

APPENDIX 5 Observation notes

9:35	Tch asks S if coffee or break.
10:55	Practice interviews in pairs
	S Bong + S Flip
	S Cong + S Hatt
	S Far + S Ind.
10:56	IC Recorder left with S Cong and S Hatt
	Observer's with S Far and S Ind.
11:00	- interrupts whole class.
	(S Cong / S Hatt did a few times of the role play - stand up and down trying to greet each other.
11:11	- T goes to S Hatt and S Cong to give the feedback.
11:15	I see S Far making gestures to S Ind regarding speaking up - to "be more interactive"

APPENDIX 6 Excerpt from Research Journal

11 September 2009

We were waiting for the computer class teacher. It was a few minutes before 13.00. Most of the students were already logged on and checking their email. Velyvet who was sitting beside me asked me a question but I could not understand what he was asking because of his accent. This is from my recollection:

S: are you maid? (I heard 'maid')

Me: sorry?

S are you maid? (I still could not understand the question)

Me no answer (I looked up, thinking for a brief moment, I must have looked puzzled)

S do you have a husband?

I was fascinated with how Velyvet actively made sure that I understood the question. I really thought he was asking if I was a 'maid' but of course that did not make sense. I was impressed by how observant he was of my facial reaction. Although I did not give him a response when he repeated the question, he knew that 'maid' was the problematic word so he rephrased the question by simply asking 'do you have a husband' to avoid using the word 'married/maid'. It struck me how comfortable I was answering a personal question although this was my third day with the group. I guess it's because he did not come across as being nosy.

APPENDIX 7 Transcription Conventions

(.)	a brief pause
(3.0)	number in parenthesis indicate timed pause in seconds
.	falling intonation at end of tone unit
?	high rising intonation at end of tone unit
,	slightly rising intonation at end of tone unit
!	animated intonation
-	unfinished utterance, e.g., false start, self-correction
WORD	Words written in capitals to indicate emphatic stress: e.g. VERY
xxx	unintelligible text
(word?)	guess at unclear text: e.g. I (apologise?) for the delay in shipment
::	noticeable lengthening of a vowel
	A: o::h, I'm sorry.
[words]	
[words]	simultaneous speech indicated in brackets: e.g.
	A: mm// Did you [read the report]
	B: [didn't have the] time
//	latching, no perceptible pause after a turn
	A: I'm going to be late //
	B // me too
(laughs)	description of current action, transcriber's comments
[...]	some text has been deleted
<i>Italics</i>	foreign language are written in italics, e.g. <i>mahal kita</i>
((word))	double parentheses indicate translation into English
	A: <i>wala</i> ((nothing))
S	refers to unidentified speaker in transcription
Ss	refers to unidentified multiple speakers

APPENDIX 8 Ethics Approval: CWC

College of Western Canada (Pseudonym)
Applied Research Advisory Committee
Research Ethics Board

Review checklist for expedited and full committee review

The following checklist is used for expedited review, full committee review and, if necessary, reviews by the appeal committee. For decisions related to ethics approval, the REB will strive to reach consensus.

Review Results	
Project Name	Social Interaction at an Adult Education College
Submission Author	Mabel Victoria
Date Reviewed	August 7, 2009 – 2nd review
Expedited Review	Yes
	Full Review
Approved as submitted	Yes
Approved with changes	Changes listed below.
Denied	Changes required for re-submission listed below.
Name:	(deleted for confidentiality reasons)
Signature:	(signature deleted)

Changes

None

APPENDIX 9 Ethics Approval (OU)



The Open University

From John Oates
Chair, The Open University Human Participants and
Materials Research Ethics Committee
Research School
Email j.m.oates@open.ac.uk
Extension 52395

To Mabel Victoria, (PI) HD student, FELS

Subject A Study of Social Interaction at an Adult Education
College: How Canadian Immigrants from Different
Linguistic and Cultural Background Use Politeness
Strategies to Establish Relations

Ref HPMEC/2009/#536/2
Date 9 July 2009

This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted on 17th February 2009, is approved by the Open University Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee.

At the conclusion of your project, by the date that you stated in your application, the Committee would like to receive a summary report on the progress of this project, any ethical issues that have arisen and how they have been dealt with.

John Oates
Chair, OU HPMEC